ERIC STEWART'S '59 JUNIOR

Guitar & Bass

SPECIAL AWARDS ISSUE!

GEAR OF THE YEAR

Anthem Publishing
December 2014 Vol 26 No 03 £4.25
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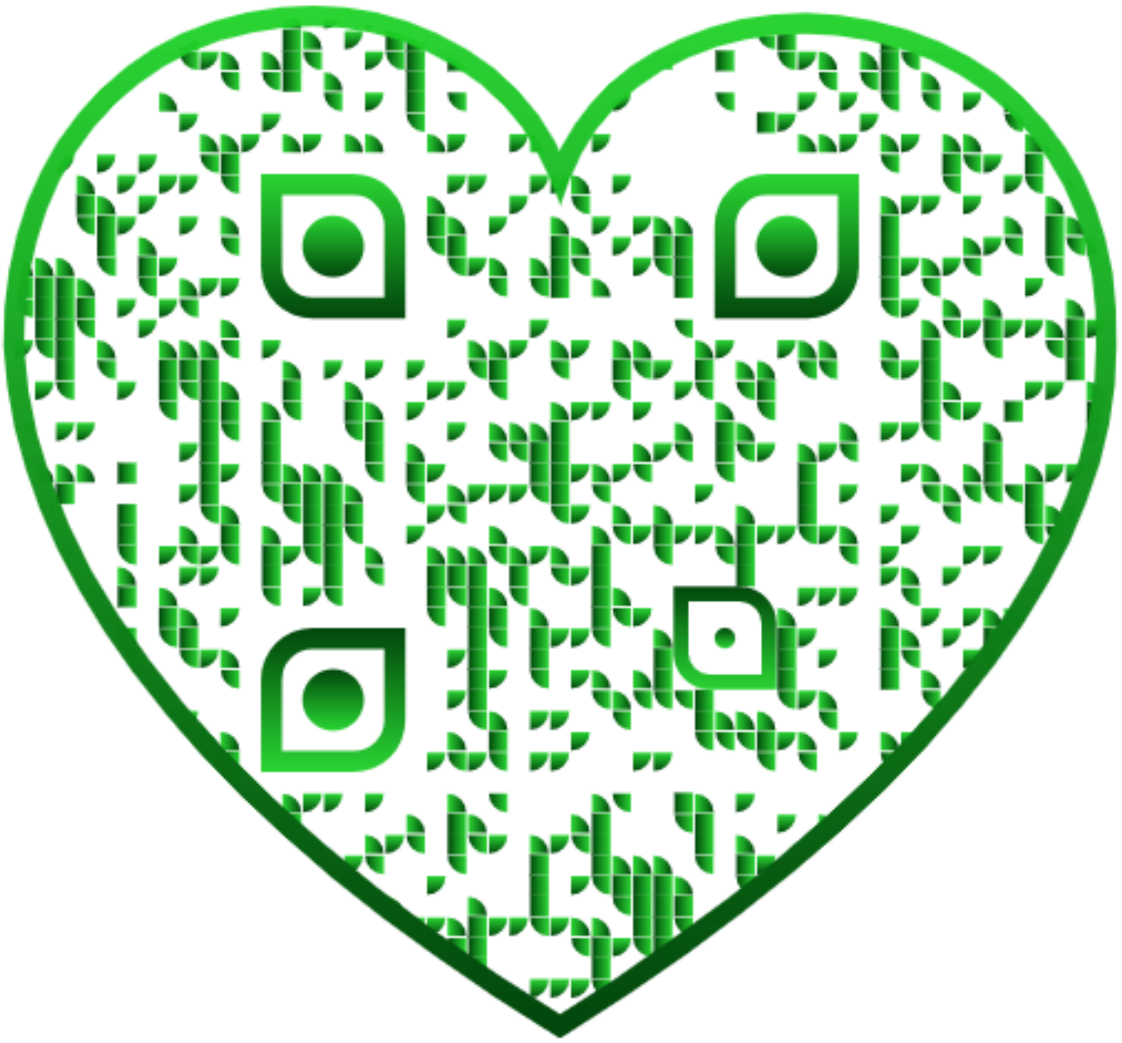
Randy Bachman
Still in overdrive

Private Collection
The art of acquiring guitars



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G-400 PRO

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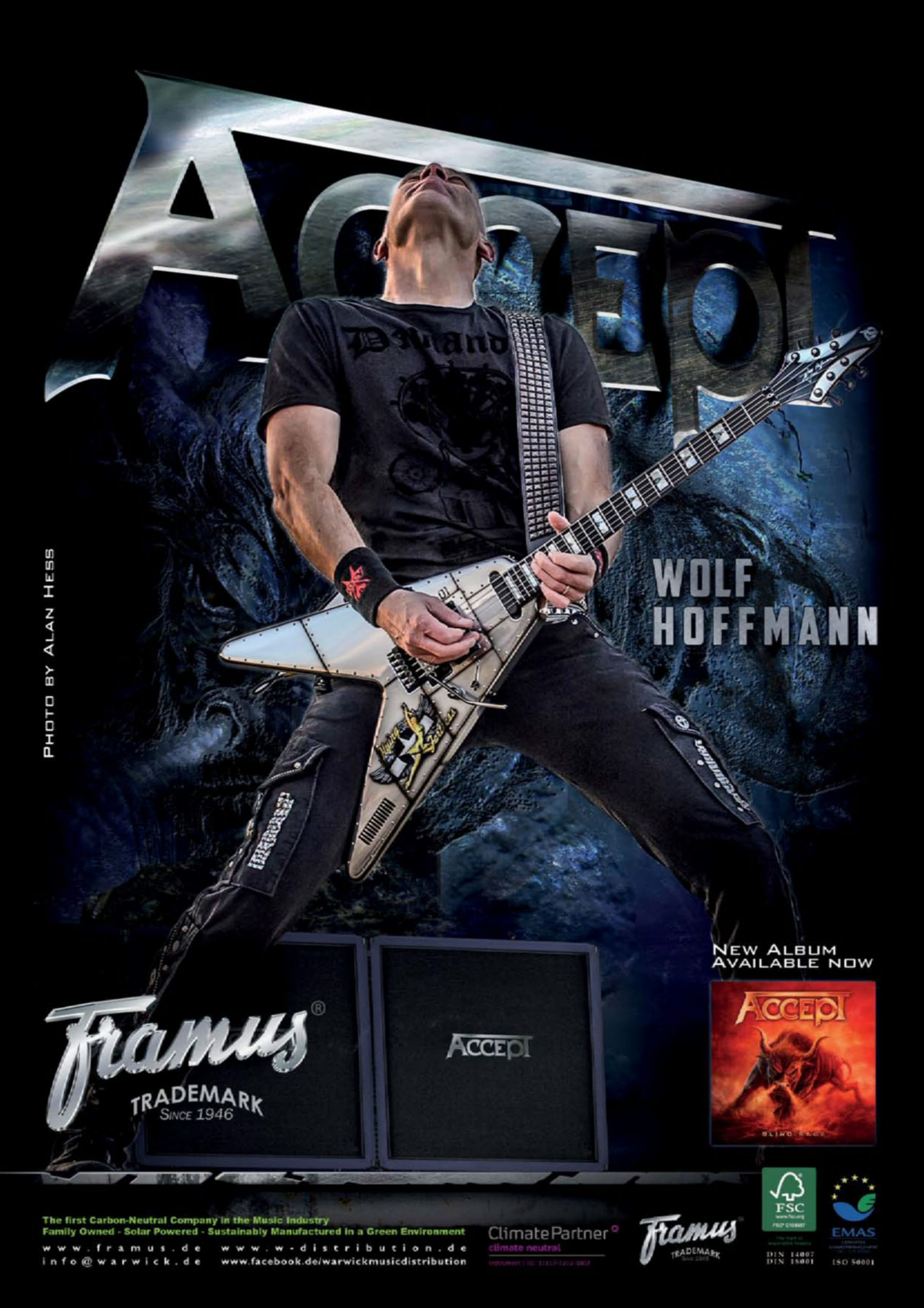
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That was the gear that was...

Oh, yes – it's the Awards Issue Special, folks. We'll spare you the usual 'Where did that year go?' small talk (although it really did just fly by, didn't it). But, as the nights draw in and 2014 winds its way to a close, it's the right time to take stock of the year in musical hardware. As always, feel free to agree or disagree regarding our choices amongst the best guitars, acoustics, basses, amps and effects. However, I hope that we can heartily agree that, whatever your ability, price range or preferences, there's something out there for everyone.

After you've surveyed our awards to your heart's content, there's still plenty of guitar-related joy to be had in this issue, whether it be a quality Randy Bachman interview, a fine, fine *Private Collection* – or even a *CSI*-style investigation into Eric Stewart's lush '59 Gibson Les Paul Junior... and, of course, www.guitar-bass.net is always on hand to fulfil your fret-based cravings until the next issue. Oh, and we should whisper that the word on the street is that both *Guitar & Bass* and Anthem Publishing are running some tasty subscription offers that would make a fine gifts for your friends, family – heck, even yourself. Turn to pages 70 and 90 for the full lowdown...

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Please note, we reserve the right to edit where we feel it is appropriate, or to print extracts from longer correspondences

Ken's Sam Li-built Flying V custom

STAR LETTER

SAM LI TRIBUTE

Does anybody know what happened to Sam Li? In the early '70s I worked as a tea boy in the Sound City music shop in Shaftesbury Avenue in London. I once made a mug of coffee for Jimi Hendrix (amongst other famous faces around at that time). Anyway, I was in my mid-teens, and enjoying it all. I used to make tea, lug amps around, make tea, sweep up, make tea, unpack guitars... but one of my jobs was to take guitars back and forth to Sam Li's workshop, which was just around the corner. He was a well thought of guitar maker and repairer. He always had a smile for me, and I remember as I walked in to see him I smelt the glue and soldering lingering in the air. Guitars, necks, bodies and bits were all over the place. I still have my Sam Li Flying V-style guitar (photo attached). It was my first electric guitar, bought and paid for by my mum and dad. I was recently reading the *Haynes Stratocaster Manual*, and it mentioned Sam Li at the back. Apparently he did a bit of work on Mark Knopfler's red Stratocaster at that time. That's what prompted me to write in to *Guitar & Bass*.

Ken Willis *via email*

G&B **Sam Li was indeed a well-regarded guitar repairer and luthier in London in the 1960s. Any mention of Sam by people to *G&B* over the years has always been as a much-loved character on the London guitar scene. Unfortunately, to the best of our knowledge, Sam Li has sadly passed away, although details seems sketchy regarding when he exactly died. If anyone reading this has any more information or any stories regarding Sam, we'd love to hear from you, so please do write in.**

Written a Star Letter? Contact Rosetti on 01376 550033 to claim your D&A stand or wallhanger. To have a look at the full D&A range: www.rosetti.co.uk/dandastands

LOOKING FOR THE MEMORY...

Nice to see the feature on Midge Ure in the Nov 14 issue. It brought back a wonderful memory of his appearance on *Jools Holland's Happening* (the Channel 4 predecessor of *Later...*) back in the late '80s (maybe early '90s... getting old!) which shocked me. There was the old guy from Ultravox, of *Vienna* fame, standing with a Gordon-Smith round his neck. No keyboard? As a teenage self-proclaimed guitar prodigy, I sat back and prepared to laugh. Midge ripped out a phenomenal version of Cream's *Strange Brew* and his guitar tone was unbelievable! And he could PLAY! I collected my jaw from the floor. In those pre-internet days, I was left wondering how the hell he'd done that or, more importantly, why I hadn't heard him do that before. A few years later I read an article about Thin Lizzy in the newly-introduced *Guitar & Bass Magazine* (Scott Gorham was on the cover. You made him blind test a series of Les Pauls to see if the vintage ones were really better, you cheeky people. I still have it somewhere) and discovered Midge had stepped into the space in Thin Lizzy left by Gary Moore, and that he'd learned the set listening to tapes on his Walkman during the flight to the US (no mention of this in the latest article... probably just as well, as it saves having to explain the concept of tapes and Walkmans).

So, you've rekindled the flame of an old memory – and made me feel very old!

Matt Fisher *via email*

G&B **Glad it hit the spot for you, Matt. As for concepts of 'tapes' and 'Walkmans', we hear that they are now quite popular with some hipster youths. Not that we'd know, mind...**

TIME SPENT APART

I'm going to try and stake my claim here as the guitar player who went the furthest between gigs. As a young guitar fanatic in the '70s, I was in a band that had delusional aspirations of making it. At a local talent contest, when I was 16, we had our first gig. We were so bad due to stage fright (as well as being awful) that the audience – who'd been supportive for everybody else – shouted at us to get off. I will remember somebody laughing at us as we lugged our gear out till the day I die. After many years of putting down the guitar due to shame, I was encouraged to start up again a few years back, due to my grandson. And I'm proud to say, that aged 54, I played a couple of numbers with him at an open mic night. Just wanted to say that the demon is now off my back.

Paul Hoggard *via email*

Woke up this mornin'...

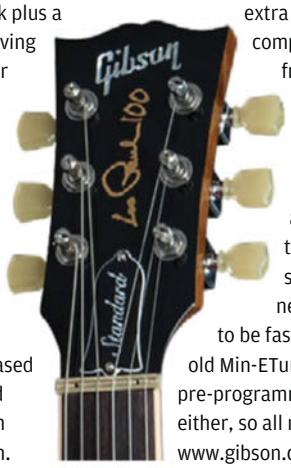
NEWS

The 2015 Les Paul

Gibson has revealed its core 2015 Les Paul range nice and early, so you can plan your purchase and start saving your pennies

Had Les Paul still been with us today then in 2015 he would be turning 100 years old. In celebration of this fact, all Les Pauls produced next year in the Nashville factory will wear a 'Les Paul 100' signature on the front of the headstock plus a small hologram of the man himself waving on the back. Good news: the Les Paul Jr and the Les Paul Special DC return to the factory line, as does the Les Paul Deluxe. Other newbies are the top-of the range semi-hollow LP Supreme with its floating neck humbucker, and the LP Less+ with a thinner body and contoured back.

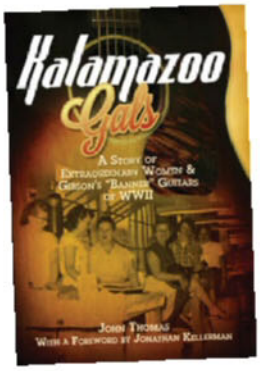
Foremost of the new features across the range is a brass Zero Fret Adjustable Nut. Benefits include increased sustain, more accurate intonation, and completely adjustable nut height, from speedy super-low to slide-friendly high.



While enjoying your custom nut height you'll notice that all necks and fingerboards are now wider for increased playing comfort, yet we're assured that the string spacing remains 'familiar'. The rosewood boards are thicker too, for claimed extra sustain. Guitars are set up by the computerised Plek system with a lower fret height for optimum intonation and action, while ultra-high-gloss, nitrocellulose finishes add maximum durability.

The new removable pickguards are nifty; they attach via prongs to tiny holes in the pickup surrounds, so no screws are needed. The new G-force tuning system is said to be faster and more accurate than the old Min-ETune, with twice the amount of pre-programmed tunings. No limited runs here either, so all models should be plentiful. Go to www.gibson.com to peruse the whole range.

Kalamazoo Gals



This fascinating new book tells the story of Gibson's cult 'Banner' acoustics, played by the likes of Woody Guthrie, Gene Autry and Buddy Holly. Around 9000 were built during World War II but, mysteriously, the fact that these fabulous guitars were made almost exclusively by a female workforce has been kept a closely-guarded secret. Author John Thomas sets out to uncover why there was such a taboo, delving deep into this mysterious period in Gibson's history. A BBC radio documentary, inspired by the book and presented by Suzi Quatro, has already aired as part of Radio 2's Guitar Season with contributions from the author. See kalamazoogals.com for more details.

ROCK'N'ROLL FANTASY CAMP

Offering the opportunity to play, record and write songs with rock legends has been the work of Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp for 18 years now. The latest dates and famous names in the frame have just been released. All events will take place in the USA and last for four days. The highlight for guitarists must be the 15-18 January camp at Foxwoods Resort, Connecticut with rock star 'counsellors' Joe Perry, Steve Morse, Lou Gramm (Foreigner) and Bumblefoot ($5,995 not including accommodation), although the 5-9 March camp featuring Pat Travers and Sammy Hagar sounds none too shoddy either. There will be six camps in total and other big names will include Roger Daltrey, Lita Ford, and Rick Derringer. See www.rockcamp.com to book yourself in.

Blackstar On The Fly

Blackstar's Fly 3 is a pocket-sized 3W amp that issues big tones from a tiny 3" speaker. There are Gain and Volume dials and an overdrive button plus Blackstar's famed Infinite Shape Feature (ISF) which runs a gamut of classic amp tones. Unusually for mini amps, there's onboard delay too. The Fly is designed to work as an MP3 device speaker, while the line-in socket means you can jam along to your favourite tunes – and it runs off DC or batteries for ultimate portability. At blackstaramps.com you'll find all the info.

SHIFTS IN AMERICAN STANDARDS

Fender have updated the two main pillars of its entire output; the American Standard Stratocaster and Telecaster. Changes include aged plastic parts and full-sounding Custom Shop Fat '50s pickups on the Strat, while the Tele gets a new body contour, a Custom Shop Twisted Tele neck pickup and Broadcaster bridge pickup. Two new finishes are available too: Bordeaux metallic and ocean blue metallic. The American Standard line also now boasts five new models: two basses, two Strats, and a Tele. Brand new options for the Stratocaster are the HSS which simply adds a Diamondback Humbucker at the bridge, and the HH which carries a pair of Twin Head Vintage humbuckers; the Tele is also now available as an HH with the same units. Fender's Dimension Bass also makes an appearance in the American Standard range for the first time, available as a four-string or five-string. Both are armed with twin humbuckers.

Kaoss on a budget

Muse's Matt Bellamy pioneered the use of the Kaoss Pad touch-screen FX unit to manipulate his guitar sounds and now Ibanez have brought such possibilities to the masses. The RGKP6 guitar has a Kaoss 2 Pad built-in alongside onboard distortion at a street price of just £319. Designed in the main for DJs who create dance mixes on the hoof, the Kaoss has 100 FX programs, a looper, a recorder and a myriad of other strange tools with names like Vinyl Break and Ducking Comp. The effects you can create are almost limitless – and if it all becomes just too much, there's a bypass button at hand.

THE GUITAR GRAND NATIONAL RETURNS

One the country's largest regional guitar events, the Merseyside Guitar Show, will take place on Sunday 23rd November 2014 from 10am to 4pm at Aintree Racecourse, Liverpool – and early signs are that it will be the biggest yet. Four floors with more than 80 exhibitors will welcome you, stuffed to the rafters with new, secondhand and vintage kit.

There'll be demos, workshops and live music all day featuring the likes of local Cavern Club favourites Xander And The Peace Pirates, tribute band Led Into Zeppelin, and virtuoso shredder Gav Coulson. When it comes to buying, selling, trading or simply browsing, you'll struggle to find a better guitar-oriented day out, and all for a cost of just £6 on the door. Get down to Aintree Racecourse Exhibition Centre, Ormskirk Rd, Liverpool, L9 5AS to nab yourself a special Christmas deal. See www.guitarshows.co.uk or telephone 01925 813185 for more information.

Calendar SHOWS, GIGS, FESTIVALS, WORKSHOPS

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Joanne Shaw Taylor
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WHERE? **15 shows just about everywhere**
TICKETS **£19.25**
CONTACT **www.joanneshawtaylor.com**

The Who
30 NOVEMBER - 18 DECEMBER
The Who Hits 50 tour starts in the UK promising 'hits, picks, mixes and misses'.
WHERE? **10 shows taking in an arena near you**
TICKETS **From £60, but selling fast**
CONTACT **www.thewho.com**

Michael Schenker's Temple Of Rock
10-20 DECEMBER
Schenker brings his Bridge The Gap world tour to the UK. Frenetic fretboard wizardry guaranteed
WHERE? **Nine shows across the country**
TICKETS **From £22.50**
CONTACT **www.michaelschenkerhimself.com**

Metal All Stars
16 DECEMBER
A special one-off metal spectacular featuring Zakk Wylde, Gus G, Dave Ellefson and a host of others
WHERE? **O2 Academy Brixton, London**
TICKETS **£27.50**
CONTACT **www.ticketmaster.co.uk 0844 844 0444**

Rodrigo Y Gabriela
30 NOVEMBER - 6 DECEMBER
Mexican guitar duo famed for reworking classics from Pink Floyd, Metallica and beyond
WHERE? **Six shows from Cambridge to Glasgow**
TICKETS **From £22**
CONTACT **www.rodgab.com or Ticketmaster**

Album reviews

Larry Miller

SOLDIER OF THE LINE

Code 7/Big Guitar Records

We know full well that Miller can throw down some scorching fretboard stuff but here his skills share equal billing with gutsy, sorrowful ballads of real warmth and sincerity. There are rockers – *I Fight Myself* is a stormer – and the leads all sting and burn with typically nuanced abandon, but songs like the emotive title track and the bittersweet *Failed Again* reveal a flourishing composer of further ambition.

Eric Johnson & Mike Stern

ECLECTIC

Votexan

In August 2013 Stern and Johnson pooled their talents for a week at the Blue Note in New York, creating a guitar summit that brought plaudits from all. A joint album was always going to be an eclectic affair; jazz, blues, rock, a sitar-ish interlude, western swing... it's all here, and such is their talent that none of it seems incongruous, even when the duo trade vocals as well as licks on the finale *Red House*. An alliance to savour.

Simple Minds

BIG MUSIC

Caroline International

At their '80s best Simple Minds were an experimental outfit that pushed the frontier of what pop music could be. The indifferent chart- and stadium-pleasing fare that followed has sullied the memory, but *Big Music* sees core members Jim Kerr and Charlie Burchill rekindle some of that spirit, adding a mature pop sensibility, all awash in elegant, ethereal, treated guitar soundscapes.

Colosseum

TIME ON OUR SIDE

Ruf

Pioneering veteran prog/jazz-rockers Colosseum veer towards the mainstream with this, their first album since 2005. Clem Clempson's sophisticated guitar lines sit in perfect harmony with Barbara Thompson's saxophone on a superior selection of songs that ooze jazzy refinement but with a laid back accessibility. Melancholy ballads meet cool blues and groovesome jazz... all with done effortless mastery.

Wayne Krantz

GOOD PIRANHA BAD PIRANHA

Abstract Logix

In an off-the-wall project, virtuoso Krantz and his conspirators have taken four popular songs – Ice Cube's *My Skin Is My Skin*, MC Hammer's *U Can't Touch This*, Pendulum's *Comprachicos* and Thom Yorke's *Black Swan* – and created two outlandish versions of each. Wild abstract runs, melodic twists and dazzling additions render them mostly unrecognisable, morphing the familiar into an strange odyssey of adept sonic wizardry.

Vargas Blues Band

FROM THE DARK

Off Yer Rocka

Hispanic blues-rock hero Javier Vargas has been pumping out quality albums since 1991 and has shared stages with the great and the good of blues and beyond. The Latin roots here are subtle: expect muscular, straight-ahead blues riffage and searing leads rendered with utter conviction. He's still a virtual unknown in the UK but on this vibrant, impassioned evidence, a breakthrough is surely imminent.

Jimmy Barnes

30:30 HINDSIGHT

Provogue

Aussie institution and ex-Cold Chisel frontman celebrates 30 years as a solo artist with the help of an all-star cast. Classic Barnes tunes have been reworked, with Joe Bonamassa, Keith Urban, Neal Schon and the Living End joining the party. Barnes was tipped to be the new AC/DC frontman when Bon Scott died, and on this evidence it'd have been a tantalising proposition. Gutsy, honest rock'n'roll.

Machine Head

BLOODSTONE & DIAMONDS

Nuclear Blast

An onslaught of crushing riffs and roaring layrnx-tearing vocals announce that Machine Head are still leading the thrash metaller pack even with 20 years on the clock. The machinegun guitar bombast of Rob Flynn and Phil Demmels is a thing of demented majesty, and even when fused with a string quartet on *Now We Die* and *Sail Into The Black*, its power is pretty astonishing. A contender for 2014's finest slice of metal.

Mark Lanegan Band

PHANTOM RADIO

Heavenly

The gravelly-voiced Lanegan has been honing his gothic folk-blues now for well over a decade, and though the latest instalment throws in some sinister '80s-style synth, the equilibrium remains broodingly unaltered. In lesser hands the weary baritone vocal and biblical imagery could simply be bleak, yet there's something strangely uplifting in Lanegan's dark world that fuels the soul in captivating style.

SNAP JUDGEMENTS

Hookworms

THE HUM

Weird World

Ferocious, hypnotic feedback-drenched riffage from a Leeds five-piece who can sculpt a minimalist psyche-rock wigout into rough-hewn beauty

Gemma Hayes

BONES + LONGING

Chasing Dragons

Hayes has a way with gorgeous, dreamy, lo-fi guitar-driven melodies that wash over you with a shimmery elegance. Gentle, seductive vocals reinforce the intimacy

Matt Woosey

WILDEST DREAMS

Robar Music

Driving, free-flowing acoustic-led folk-blues courtesy of a man who has graduated from a Thin Lizzy tribute band to become an intense, rootsy troubadour

Wild Billy Childish & CTMF

ACORN MAN

Damaged Goods

Kent's legendary garage rocker powers through lo-fi rock'n'roll with ramshackle charm and total conviction like no one else can

Kate Rusby

GHOST

Pure

The darling of the British folk scene returns with a sublime collection of original trad-style tunes rich in narrative, atmosphere and fine musicianship

The Hoax

RECESSION BLUES: A TRIBUTE TO BB KING

Credible

After a glorious return in 2013 with *Big City Blues*, one of the UK's finest blues outfits honours Riley B King's finest moments in style

Photo: Pat Graham

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JONNY GREENWOOD
WITH THE LONDON CONTEMPORARY ORCHESTRA — JULY 28, 2014
ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON, ENGLAND

Fender

WINNERS
Guitar Awards 2014

GEAR *of the* YEAR

Throughout each year we rate every piece of equipment under review for quality of sound, construction, value and, heck, just plain coolness. The very best of the best makes it to *Guitar & Bass* magazine's Gear Of The Year issue - from acoustics both traditional and electro to electrics, basses, pedals and amplifiers too. So if you're planning to invest in your music in the coming 12 months, then the recommendations on the following pages should give you a great place to start...

EPIPHONE
Ltd Ed 1966 G-400 Pro

A '60s SG tribute that's right on the money

PRICE: **£348**
CONTACT**: Gibson Europe**
0031 347 324010
www.epiphone.com

REVIEWED
JANUARY
25/04

Take the basic Epiphone G-400, which has been in production since 1989, change the pickguard, add keystone tuners, coil-tappable Alnico Classic Pro pickups and offer a bunch of new finishes, and you've got this limited edition. And why 1966? Well, that was when the 'large' type pickguard was first introduced.

Out of the case the G-400 Pro looks excellent. The set-up is spot-on, and while some SGs can be a little neck-heavy, this one balances perfectly on the strap. The glued-in neck feels chubbier than the '60s Slim Taper specified, but it's a pleasing and not-overbuilt handful.

The pickups are of the four-wire variety to facilitate the coil tap, which is activated by the push/pull action of the volume controls. The G-400's fully-humbucking clean tone is surprising good and the twin pickup and neck pickup sounds are refreshingly open with an unexpectedly warm bass response. Really, this does sound like a much more expensive guitar. In terms of clarity these clean voices definitely outperform the vintage soupiness of some of their Gibson equivalents. SGs are practically born to rock, so it comes as no surprise that winding up the gain makes a good thing even better. With a potential street price of around £260 this is a budget guitar that's very hard to ignore.

WINNER
Guitar Awards 2014
Electric Guitar Under £500

BURNS

Club Series King Cobra

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

A high-spec Burns for less

REVIEWED NOVEMBER 26/02

PRICE **£299, or £319 with a flamed maple top**
CONTACT **Burns London**
+ 44 (0) 208 7833 638
WEB **www.burnsguitars.com**

The entry-level Burns Cobra may seem a bargain at only £249, but for just £50 more the higher spec'd King Cobra offers a bound Indian rosewood fingerboard with block inlays, a hard-rock maple neck, locking tuners and a proper alder body… and if you fancy splashing out a further £20, you can have a tasty Canadian maple flame top like the one pictured.

The medium-gauge fretting is excellent and the white fingerboard edge binding adds a touch of class while the quality Indian rosewood fretboard feels very good under the fingers. The Tri-Sonic pickups alone retail at £120 a set, so you can see what good value the Cobra represents; also, the circuitry on the King model has been arranged slightly differently than on the regular Cobra to create all manner of classic lead sounds.

This guitar rings like a bell, perhaps illustrating the difference body timber can make; it's ideal for clear, bright chords and intricate picking. Gradually increasing amp gain brings on a range of gnarly, edgy blues and rock rhythm sounds that are uniquely Burns-esque in flavour. The regular Cobra is a solid performer but the King offers some of the nuances and refinements of a guitar from a much higher price bracket. It also sounds distinctly like a Burns, so it's a great way to add a unique character to your guitar stash without busting the bank.

A great way to add a unique character to your guitar stash without busting the bank

DANELECTRO

'59M-NOS

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Jimmy Page vibes in technicolor

REVIEWED JUNE 25/09

PRICE **£449**
CONTACT **John Hornby Skewes**
0113 286 5381
www.jhs.co.uk or www.danelectro.com

The three factors that set this guitar apart from a standard double-cut Dano are the NOS pickups, the Badass-style bridge and the fancy colours – ours is in 'Come Back Baby Blue'. It's strange to contemplate that the modern Danelectro company has been around long enough to have anything that could be described as NOS (new old stock), but that's exactly how it's describing the pickups on this guitar. Apparently, Danelectro discovered a batch of unused pickups in its warehouse dating back 15 years – which might not seem that long but it does, to be fair, put them in a whole different century. Do 15-year-old pickups sound markedly different to brand new ones? Maybe, but that's possibly the least significant of the three selling points. The Jimmy Page connection is the most pertinent. Page's favourite lo-fi twanger with Led Zep was a 1961 Danelectro 3021, in black, to which he fitted a Badass bridge. A replica of this guitar was launched a few years ago and, pickups aside, the '59M-NOS shares its basic spec. In a sense, the extra sustain provided by the bridge makes the '59M-NOS less Dano-ish than other models – acoustically it's not as banjo-like; plugged-in, that familiar cluck is still there, but with perhaps more pep than we're used to. Dig in to single notes, though, and that vintage twang will leap out and force a smile, as will the intensely vivid hues of those radiant finishes.

Dig in to single notes and that vintage twang will force a smile, as will the intensely vivid hues of those radiant finishes

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ELX-397-ADV-EN-SEP14

GRETSCH
G5620T Electromatic Centre-Block

Conquer feedback without forsaking style

REVIEWED APRIL 25/07

PRICE: **£910.80**
CONTACT: **Fender GB&I**
01342 331700
www.gretsch.com

Armed with a calming block of pine running down the middle, this guitar is a high-gain-friendly Gretsch that nails the best of the old and of the new in one package. The first Centre-Block models emerged in the high-end bracket, but now the Electromatic range is bringing the design down to a more affordable price. For the uninitiated, Gretsch guitars have most frequently been either solid or completely hollow – there were some exceptions from the '70s – but this feedback-busting approach puts them back in direct competition with Gibson's famed thinline semi-acoustics, such as the ES-335.

Gretsch pickups are relatively low in output so you do have to turn up a bit for the full effect, though the reward is a particular form of bright sparkle that's very hard to draw from any other brand of guitar. At the G5620T's bridge position there's a Filter'Tron humbucker, perfect for adventures in overdrive, while at the neck there's a Super HiLo'Tron, a low-noise, dual-coil pickup designed to deliver a classic single-coil sound. It certainly conveys a generous amount of the guitar's natural acoustic tone, and it feels three-dimensional and alive.

This pickup combination along with the Bigsby vibrato and that all-important centre block makes the G5620T an ideal choice for a player who desires that cool, retro style but not to the exclusion of wider tonal options.

WINNER
Guitar Awards 2014
Electric Guitar £500 – £1000

WASHBURN

Parallaxe PXM20FRFBCBM

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

High-performance rock apparatus

PRICE **£899**
CONTACT **Sound Technology**
01462 480000
www.soundtech.co.uk

REVIEWED FEBRUARY 25/05

If you require versatility, this instrument has it in spades. It's been calibrated for the dedicated shredder but can capably cover the entire spectrum of the electric guitar repertoire with aplomb – the only exception being the obvious lack of hollowbody tones. It's incredibly easy to play, light as a feather, and the fairly conservative styling means it would be at home in a number of contexts – but, yes, it excels when it comes to hard and heavy rock, and eats just about every sort of metal for breakfast.

Most of those cumbersome letters in the name are Washburn-speak for a Floyd Rose equipped/Seymour Duncan pickup model. It sits at the top of its line, and inspection of the delicate contours of the mahogany body reveals it's quite a work of art. The 24-fret set neck blends seamlessly into the body, and access all the way up to the second octave is great. All Parallaxe models feature an ebony fingerboard; the intonation is almost spookily perfect and overall the neck feels great. The super-smooth jumbo-size frets give you plenty of metal to bend against, making soloing a joyous experience. The coil tap option activated by the push/pull tone and volume adds the flexibility of single coil tones, and its bell-like clean capabilities come as an unexpected bonus. And another thing – this guitar sustains forever; drench liberally with reverb and season with echo… lovely.

This guitar has been calibrated for the dedicated shredder but can cover the entire spectrum of electric guitar with aplomb

SCHECTER

Banshee 6FR Active

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Serious metal ordnance at a great price

PRICE **£699**
CONTACT **Westside Distribution**
0844 326 2000
www.westsidedistribution.com

REVIEWED MARCH 25/06

Out of the box the Banshee is a well-presented beast. We're loving the crimson-red burst on the flame maple veneer that sits on top of the alder drop-top body, and this is a relatively light and very comfortable guitar that's ridiculously easy to play in every position up and down the 24-fret ebony fretboard – which, in another nice touch, is framed by classy maple binding. It's actually the first Schecter to have a compound radius fingerboard, which partly explains the superb feel.

The bridge is a genuine Floyd Rose 1000 Series unit, and tuning stability is exceptional. Pickups are active EMGs, which do polarise opinion, but in this setting they work exceptionally well. So what's the advantage of the active pickups? The additional circuitry is essentially a preamp, so the instrument's flexibility lies in the provision of a pristine high-output signal. If you want to fine-tune your sound for crunchy chords and super-distorted solos that retain clarity and punch or require very low noise and copious quantities of clean sustain, then they could be for you. Players with old-school tastes may also appreciate the way you can sculpt classic tones with these EMG pickups, and you can get killer sounds with surprisingly little effort. The Banshee is also ideal for lower volume playing and for the home recordist the hi-fi output really makes most kit sing. The Banshee 6FR Active has a real professional feel at a very competitive price, and most importantly it's loads of fun to play.

The Banshee is ridiculously easy to play in every position up and down the ebony fretboard

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Patrick James Eggle, **Faith Guitars**

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Faith Guitars

GIBSON
2014 Les Paul Classic

A Lester with a whole lot more under the bonnet

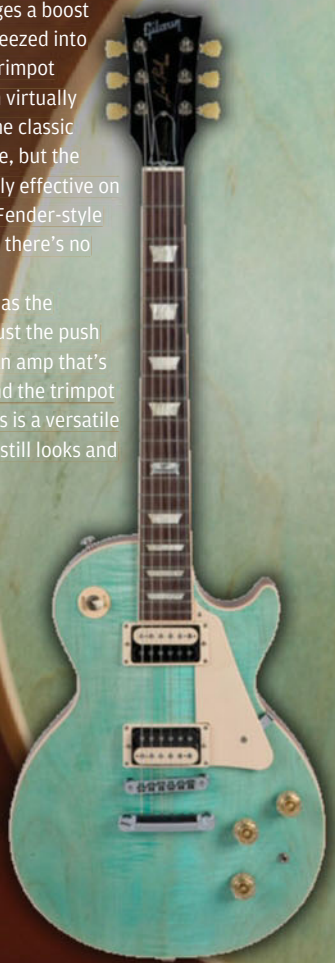
REVIEWED AUGUST 25/11

PRICE: **£1499**
CONTACT: **Gibson Europe**
0031 347 324010
www.gibson.com

Gibson has a lot of customers who think the history of the electric guitar ended in 1961 – or maybe wish it had – and a lot of potential new customers who have grown up in an era of pickup upgrades, wiring mods and zany custom refins. So finding the best of both worlds isn't an ideal – it's a life-or-death challenge. As an attempt to bridge that almost impossible gap, this 2014 Les Paul Classic is pretty great.

Beyond the new custom colours – this one is a translucent seafoam green – the first hints at modernity are the 'slim taper' neck profile and chamber-assisted weight reduction. Pickups are uncovered alnico '57 Classics but the control configuration is unusual: both volumes are push-pull and one of the tone controls has done a runner, to be replaced by a toggle switch. The push-pull allows you to run each humbucker in single-coil mode, while the toggle engages a boost circuit. There's a PP3 battery squeezed into the rear control cavity next to a trimpot for adjusting the boost level from virtually zero to 15dB. Rest assured that the classic Les Paul sound is here in full force, but the coil tap is a revelation – it's equally effective on both pickups, offering authentic Fender-style zing and even a hint of cluck, and there's no significant drop in output.

Boost simply sounds the same as the unboosted tone, but louder; it's just the push you need for sweaty solos. With an amp that's already over the tipping point, and the trimpot turned up to full, it's insanity! This is a versatile player's guitar for our times that still looks and sounds like a 'real' Les Paul.



WINNER
Guitar Awards 2014
Electric Guitar Over £1000

B3
Phoenix Driftwood

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Famous influences collide

PRICE **£2499**
CONTACT **Coda Music**
01438 350 815
www.b3guitars.com

REVIEWED NOVEMBER 26/02

The influences behind the this guitar are obvious; it's the famous twin-pickup Californian twanger of 1950 in a collision with a Gibson Firebird. There are plenty of Firebird copies out there, but very few have this stepped mahogany through-neck construction. Mini-humbuckers are a prerequisite for Firebird sounds and the Phoenix has two of them, while the bridge is a Barden-made ashtray with three traditional slanted brass saddles and a stacked, noiseless Dimarzio Area T bridge pickup. The tone knob doubles up as a push/pull coil tap switch for the mini-humbuckers, and the switch is a five-way. As for the build quality, it's top-drawer. The fretwork is precise and the edges of the board are gently rolled over for comfort.

The lightweight Phoenix is acoustically bright and chimey, but with more sustain than a typical Fender and a more even response. The rather remarkable mini-humbuckers combine ballsy aggression and fat mids with a wide-open high frequency response. It's a unique tone that's articulate, touch-sensitive and super-clear, and it cuts right through a mix. The sustain is effortless and there's no shortage of dynamic response or touch-sensitivity, while the Area T provides all the necessary bite and twang. Equally adept at clean stuff and high-gain shredding, this B3 Phoenix is a triumphant blend of simplicity and style.

Equally adept at clean stuff and high-gain shredding, this B3 Phoenix is a triumphant blend of simplicity and style

GODIN
Montreal Premier

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Refined, feedback-free tones

PRICE **£1399**
CONTACT **440 Distribution**
0113 258 9599
www.440distribution.com

REVIEWED MAY 25/08

The Godin Montreal Premiere, with its four-figure price-tag, sits close to the top of the Canadian company's range – but it's a whole lot of North American guitar for the money. At heart this is a single-cutaway variant on the timeless Gibson ES-335 template: a thinline archtop with a solid centre block, twin humbuckers and a 24.75" scale length, although the top, back and sides are Canadian wild cherry rather than maple and the centre block isn't really solid: a series of arches are carved into the side that meets the back of the guitar. This, in theory, allows the tone to 'breathe' more, without compromising the feedback-busting properties.

The guitar is impressively well made and the first ker-chang of an open E chord reveals the Montreal's natural voice to be strong and full, with a forceful midrange. Plug into a clean amp and the first thing to report is the sweetness of its core tone – especially on the middle pickup setting, which provides all the twinkliness of a classic semi-acoustic and a beautifully smooth low end. The neck pickup is fat and soulful, and the bridge 'bucker has plenty of characterful '60s bark.

We can report hollowbody howling is not a major issue, arriving only a few notches earlier than it does for an SG with similarly-voiced pickups. The differences between a really good semi and a mediocre one are primarily about tonal balance and refinement, and in that respect Godin has whumped its arrows right into the bullseye.

The Godin has a sweet core tone, from twinkly with a smooth low end to a characterful '60s bark

Johan L., quality check guitar
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FRESHMAN
SongoTSB

Great sound, good looks – and affordable too

REVIEWED SEPTEMBER 25/12

PRICE: **£399**
CONTACT**: Access All Areas**
01355228028
www.freshmanguitars.net

Freshman's Songwriter Series is all about solid woods, and in the case of the SongoTSB that means Canadian sitka spruce and mahogany. It's an orchestra model with a sweetly minimal matte finish in sunburst all over, including the back and the neck (you can get a natural version, too), plus all-wood binding and herringbone trim; at under £400, that's seriously impressive. It's even got a bone nut and saddle.

Playability is great. The neck is a nice palm-filling shape and the action on our review model was tip-top. The sound impressed us, too. It's pretty big and chimey for a guitar of this compact size and also genuinely responsive, so you don't need to hammer at it to get the top moving, and shifting your picking hand from bridge towards neck produces a fine range of colours. It's perhaps a touch barky to make an ideal high-volume strummer, but that's partly a smaller-body mahogany thing, and a lighter rhythm touch gives excellent results.

It's at fingerpicking that the Songo really excels. It's crisp and articulate, with a solid bass, a Martin-like feathery quality to the treble and a nice strong midrange – and what it might lack in sonorous refinement it makes up for with rootsy and bluesy country charm. Freshman isn't the only company manufacturing affordable, all-solid wood acoustics in the Far East with bone bits and cool tuners, but it can't be said that anybody is doing it better.

WINNER
Guitar Awards 2014
Acoustic Guitar Under £1000

ARIA
501

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Simplicity and tradition

PRICE **£499**
CONTACT **Aria UK**
01483 238720
www.ariauk.com

REVIEWED **FEBRUARY 25/05**

Aria's 500 series guitars are all about the important stuff: decent woods and traditional designs, no cutaways, and no electronics. Like the Freshman this Aria breaks the half-grand barrier in terms of price. It's an all-solid sitka/mahogany orchestra model guitar (there's also a rosewood version, the 505), and it's decorated with handsome herringbone purfling. This time, though we get a gloss body finish with a satin neck, and cream plastic binding instead of wood. It also has a nut width of just under 1.75", which is good news for fingerpickers, and the picture is completed by a bone saddle and open-geared chrome machineheads.

The 501 is really big and open-sounding for a brand-new instrument, and especially so for a folk-sized guitar. This guitar impressed us both with what it puts out and the level at which it does it. It's eager, bright and balanced, strums very nicely and thumbpicks very well indeed, with plenty of instant response and a likeable woody character. These guitars mark something of a return to form for Aria, and while you can get cheaper folk-size models, on the whole we think the price of this one is definitely reflected in the sound.

The Aria 501 is eager, bright and balanced and very big and open-sounding for a brand new folk-sized guitar

BREEDLOVE
Discovery Dreadnought

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Super-affordable rhythm/flatpicker

PRICE **£299**
CONTACT **Rosetti**
01376 550033
www.breedlovemusic.com

REVIEWED **OCTOBER 26/01**

A spin on a classic theme, the Discovery is more rounded and less boxy than a regular dread and this gives it an old-school look, almost like a cross between a dread and jumbo. It's a got a solid sitka top and laminated sapele back and sides, a gloss body, a satin-finished neck, open-geared tuners, and a pinless bridge with a modernised shape to go with the contemporary headstock.

Its most obvious sonic characteristic is, well... loudness. You should expect a good amount of volume from any dreadnought, but this one can really belt it out. Played hard the Discovery generates a chiming, punchy and very defined sound that's exhilarating to play, but when you soften the attack the tone mellows and sweetens without losing any focus. Breedlove has also built in an impressive degree of snap and definition that really delivers the goods when picking out the bass notes for bluegrass-style rhythm work. The midrange isn't too recessed and the treble has plenty of airiness. It can become a tad brash when pushed very hard, but sitka spruce will mellow over time. It isn't a great all-rounder – the crisp attack that makes it such an effective rhythm instrument is a bit of a handful when you attempt delicate fingerstyle work – but so long as you're aware of this guitar's strengths and weaknesses, it won't disappoint... especially not at this price.

The Breedlove Discovery can really belt out the volume and it has a chiming, punchy and very well-defined sound

Martin & Co
EST. 1833

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BREEDLOVE
Oregon Concert

Classy contemporary all-rounder

REVIEWED OCTOBER 26/01

PRICE: **£1729**
CONTACT: **Rosetti**
01376 550033
www.breedlovemusic.com

Handcrafted in Bend, Oregon, this high-end Breedlove breaks away from the norm by employing not mahogany, rosewood or one of the other common timbers for its back and sides, but myrtle – a wood which sounds rather like maple but comes in a variety of yellow and orange shades, with hints of flame and a lovely grain pattern. The top is high-grade sitka, set off with black binding and herringbone trim, while the fingerboard, bridge, peghead overlay and tuner buttons are all ebony, giving a clean and stylish look. The neck is actually maple, and bolted on in the modern manner, while the pickup system – which is obligatory on this model, as there's no acoustic-only option – is a Fishman Ultra-Tone undersaddle piezo with the controls tucked just inside the soundhole.

Breedlove says that myrtle gives a strong fundamental with a powerful voice, and that's dead right. It's a refined and well-balanced guitar, with great depth and solidity in the bass; little energy is needed to make it speak, and it feels full of life. Notes fit together sweetly, which makes smooth picking easy. The harmonic dryness and prominent midrange provide a hint of a parlour guitar, albeit with an expanded frequency range. It's good for blues and ragtime, and it seems to relish open and dropped tunings, with power and definition retained as low as open D and C. Single notes have a rounded, pure quality that are effective for solo work, and this guitar is also very easy to record because it doesn't eat up too much space or add boominess to the low end.

The Fishman system is adequate; if you're really serious then it could be regarded as a bit basic and 'piezo' sounding, but it's smoother and more tuneful than many of its type. The Oregon Concert is a high-quality guitar that performs well for rhythm and fingerstyle, and it should appeal to players who like a modern look but appreciate a guitar that can cover a wide repertoire of styles, both old and new.

LAKEWOOD

M-18

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Efficiency and power

PRICE **£1522**
CONTACT **Go To Guitars, 01925 444696**
www.gotoguitars.com,
www.lakewood-guitars.com

REVIEWED MAY 25/08

The Lakewood M-18 is the type of guitar that serious players might buy if they tend to follow their heads rather than their hearts. Made in Germany by a long-established and highly respected company, it's all cleanliness and accuracy, and this Natural Series model has an all-wood theme and an open-pore finish. The top is AAA grade European spruce top, the back and sides are ovangkol – matched by the handsome soundhole ring – and the fingerboard ebony. Every aspect of the construction is super-precise, right down to the frets, which are perfectly seated and dressed to kill.

Soundwise the M-18 is a fine all-rounder with healthy bass, strong mids and soft trebles. Though it will fingerpick very nicely, it's a fairly beefy and punchy-sounding guitar, so it's equally suited to more forceful picking styles and rhythm duties. The company makes no claim that ovangkol is a rosewood substitute; the clear treble, the complex harmonics and the impressive sustain are certainly rosewood-like attributes, but this guitar's thick and chewy midrange character is perhaps closer to walnut. The build quality and the sound justify the price: it's a great example of European luthierie.

The beefy, punchy-sounding M-18 fingerpicks nicely and is equally suited to more forceful styles and rhythm duties

HUSS & DALTON

Crossroads Deluxe

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Ultimate luxury, 1930s style

PRICE **£3999**
CONTACT **Brilliant Distribution**
01425 480595
www.hussanddalton.com

REVIEWED MAY 25/08

Huss & Dalton hail from Staunton, Virginia, and the Crossroads is essentially a Gibson L-00 tribute – a small, sweetly-shaped 14-fret model, with the 'Deluxe' tag adding AAA-grade flamed maple back, sides and neck, more decoration and a deeper body, bringing it closer to the Gibson Nick Lucas of 1934-1941. The build is impeccable, with superb woods, a delicious sunburst finish, and a 24.75" scale allied to a 1.75" nut.

Maple has the reputation of sometimes sounding hard and bright and this brand-new H&D is still a touch toppy and crisp, but it's already promisingly responsive. The mids jump out willingly from a pick, while the bottom E is tight and full and the trebles are silvery, breathy and echoey. With an uncultured hand the restricted dimensions can bring on a sense of boxiness, but play full chords with a softer touch and there's a nice low-end bloom coming through that bodes well for the years to come. Lightweight and dynamic, this snappy, sparkly, open-sounding little guitar is almost purpose-built for bluesy fingerpicking, and displays plenty of articulacy with bare fingers or fingerpicks. Replicating a vintage Gibson sound isn't really the aim: it's masterfully-made, stunningly finished, and it pays attention to vintage specs without being afraid to add a fresh slant in terms of neck profile and sound.

Lightweight and dynamic, the snappy, sparkly, open-sounding Crossroads is almost purpose-built for bluesy fingerpicking

RETROMATIC
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Signature
Handmade Guitars For Over 40 Years!
Peerless
numubu
www.peerlessguitars.eu

SEAGULL
Walnut Mini Jumbo Isys T

No trimmings, just great tone and playability

PRICE: **£479**
CONTACT: **440 Distribution**
01132 589599
www.seagullguitars.com

REVIEWED APRIL 25/07

We're so used to getting flash for our cash these days that the Seagull comes over as almost brutally Spartan. Don't be deceived: this honest, no-frills instrument has been built to last a lifetime. It might have a satin finish and no binding or inlays whatsoever, but the spruce top is solid wood, back and sides are laminated Canadian walnut, the neck is maple, and the fingerboard is rosewood. You can buy a purely acoustic version, but this one has a Fishman undersaddle piezo pickup with an Isys T control module mounted on the upper bout. In addition to a built-in tuner there are Volume, Bass and Treble controls plus a phase switch and a battery level indicator.

The tone of this guitar really impressed us. Big-bodied acoustics can sound boomy, but the Mini Jumbo's bass is ample and well-defined. It isn't exactly a bright-sounding guitar, but there's a pleasing amount of chime. Above all there's a wonderful warm woodiness to the midrange, and what really sets the Mini Jumbo apart is the way it responds so freely to playing touch. It doesn't need a strong right arm attack to get the top moving, and this makes it a dynamic strummer as well as an expressive fingerpicker. Dropped tunings are handled with ease, and low strings retaining weight and definition along with excellent string separation; in fact, it sounds very like an all-solid walnut instrument, running a middle line between the earthiness of mahogany and the harmonic complexity of rosewood. Although there's no mistaking the piezo pickup, it's easy to dial in pleasing tones using the Bass and Treble controls, and the amplified sound bears more than a passing resemblance to the acoustic tone. The phase switch is a welcome addition and, although it's not super-accurate, the tuner is a bonus. Factor in a modern, fairly flat C-shaped neck profile with a medium/low action, and the Mini Jumbo is a real player's guitar.

WINNER
Guitar Awards 2014
Electro Acoustic Under £1000

MARTIN

OOORS1

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Martin sound on a budget

REVIEWED MARCH 25/06

PRICE **£729**
CONTACT **Westside Distribution**
0141 248 4812
www.martinguitar.com

If you always fancied a Martin 000-15 but could do with shelling out a little less dough then the Road Series OOORS1 might do the trick. Made with solid sapele top, back and sides but with a laminated Stratabond neck and a Richlite fingerboard and a satin finish all over, it cuts some well-judged corners to provide a quite Martin-esque tone at a medium price.

This 14-fret long-scale 000 sounds bright and balanced, with a good sense of softness to the trebles, bouncy, wiry mids and a nice solid bottom string. Volume is medium, the sustain is good, and it does sound somewhat like the more upmarket 000-15 with its dry, sweet, slightly compressed, mid-focussed tone. The pickup system is the Fishman Sonitone undersaddle piezo linked to soundhole-mounted volume and treble controls. The sound is typically Fishman, balance seems fine, and while the soundhole controls aren't that easy to tweak, their invisibility is laudable. The 1/ Road Series is a well-honed section of the Martin range, and the OOORS1 is likely to attract those who reckon that an all-solid wood body, a nice sound, a simple pickup system and the Martin name adds up to a pretty tasty deal.

The OOORS1 is bright and balanced, and the all-solid body and simple electronics add up to a good deal

CRAFTER

DG-Rose Plus

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Here be dragons

REVIEWED JULY 25/10

PRICE **£799**
CONTACT **Sutherland Trading**
02920 887333
www.crafterguitars.uk.com

In terms of character this Crafter is diametrically opposed to the Martin OOORS1. Lavishly decorated with a pearl and abalone dragon scuttling down the fingerboard, it's a glossy, glamorous guitar for somebody who's feeling very confident indeed. Yet it isn't all show. The neck is a peach, while the top is solid Engelmann spruce, the back solid rosewood, and the sides laminated rosewood. It comes with an LR Baggs Element piezo under the bridge saddle, and the LR-T DX preamp is well-equipped with Volume and Notch rotaries, four bands of EQ, phase reverse, and an output-muting LCD tuner.

Under gentle fingers or pick the Crafter sounds quite dynamic, with plenty of top-end and a hefty kick in the midrange which starts to become boxy when you really dig in. It's good for bright strumming, and a thumbpick makes the most of the fractionally weak low end, which suffers slightly with bare fingers alone. The pickup sounds good: Presence adjusts the sparkle perfectly, the sweepable midrange is a boon and the well-judged bass slider adds a richness that makes the most of the undersaddle piezo sound. Although a highly-decorated midrange model, the DG-Rose is a nice-playing guitar which sounds reasonable acoustically and even better plugged in. The 1.75" nut will find favour with fingerpickers and all the pearl sure makes it stand out from the crowd.

With a pearl dragon scuttling down the fingerboard this is a guitar for someone feeling very confident indeed

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www.synergydistribution.co.uk

TAYLOR
814ce

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PRICE: **£3023**
CONTACT: **Taylor Guitars**
31 (0) 20 667 6033
www.taylorguitars.com

REVIEWED AUGUST 25/11

The spruce/rosewood 814ce is a long-established Taylor flagship, but under the auspices of new master luthier Andy Powell it's been given a complete re-working. Where do we even begin? It's lighter with re-thicknessed top and back and also has a thinner finish, diagonal back braces, parabolically tapered top bracing, stiffened sides, new glue technology, many, many cosmetic detail changes and the new Expression System 2.

Does it still sound like a Taylor? Well, yes. But yet somehow more so. This 2014 version boots up the mids and lower mids to a fair degree, with a heavier impact spread across from the A to the G string. Under fingerpicking the 814ce seems to have a little more under the hood when it comes to dynamics and response. Of course this also affects strumming, and you might say that the extra horsepower favours a slightly more cultured right hand. Taylor has mentioned that they've attempted to fatten up the trebles, and though that doesn't come across quite as strongly to us as the increase in the lower mids, the 814 does work well with a fat pick for full-toned jazzy lines. But the biggest change comes when you use a flatpick to pick out fills and basslines. Those kind of moves now really muscle out and forwards, and in fact you almost have to be extra careful on the D string below the fifth fret because there's quite an overt thump waiting there. Plugged in, the ES2 system seems plenty loud, with gentle and well-judged control parameters. It has a residue of the attacky characteristics of a regular undersaddle system but extra fatness and a hint of a bullet-proof soundhole magnetic. Less precious and zingy than before, we'd say its warmth and its high resistance to feedback is a major plus.

So we think the 2014 814ce is a little more involving than before. The neck is super-sweet, the fretwork and set up are perfect, the intonation is tip-top and the fit and finish are top-notch; the changes, both acoustically and plugged-in, make it a more fulfilling experience.

LAKEWOOD

A-31

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

European fingerstyle specialist

PRICE **£1939**
CONTACT **Go To Guitars, 01925 444696**
www.gotoguitars.com
www.lakewood-guitars.com

REVIEWED MAY 25/08

The fact that two Lakewoods have snuck into our 2014 Gear Of The Year awards is a cogent reminder that when looking for a great guitar, we should search close to home as well as across the Atlantic. The A-31 Custom is very different to the M-18: a smaller cutaway slothead with a 12th fret neck join, it has a body of European spruce and rosewood and a noise-cancelling LR Baggs Anthem pickup system that allows you to mix an Element undersaddle piezo pickup, designed to handle the lows and mids, with an internal condenser microphone, which captures the upper mids and treble.

The A-31's sound is crisp and even with plenty of sustain and complex harmonic overtones and there's a delicate tonal quality with a fast and complex response that will win favour with dedicated fingerpickers. The Element pickup is dry and attenuated in the highs; the Tru-Mic is louder and brighter, with more airiness. Together they make a nice combination, and ultimately it adds up a superior acoustic pickup system that actually manages to reproduce the sound and dynamic response of the guitar itself. This little Lakewood is a likeable and very capable instrument.

The A-31 is crisp with plenty of sustain, and there's a delicate tonal quality which will find favour with fingerpickers

TAKAMINE

P7DC

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Japanese showcase

PRICE **£2232**
CONTACT **Takamine Europe**
takamineguitars/eu/uk

REVIEWED JANUARY 25/04

Over two grand buys you a lot of guitar from some of the best-respected brands in guitardom – so why should you plump for a Japanese-made Takamine? Because it's as finely made and well-equipped as anything else out there, that's why. We're looking at top-grade sitka and Indian rosewood, maple binding, an abalone soundhole ring, a near-perfect standard of build and finish, and an extremely capable undersaddle pickup linked to a CoolTube preamp. Acoustically the P7DC is an impeccably well-mannered dreadnought, with a soft attack and a rich, lush sound packed with chiming, rosewoody overtones. It's a super-luxurious rhythm and accompaniment guitar.

The six Palathetic piezos are said to sense some top vibration; they sound undersaddle-ish in character but it's all very well balanced, while the CoolTube knob gradually dials in a likeable sense of added richness and body. Plush and efficient, that's the Takamine P7DC. It's very well-built, the materials are top-notch, the CoolTube unit is a fine preamp; it's slightly heavy thanks to the preamp and extra batteries and the full-feeling asymmetrical neck is an acquired taste, but if you like a wider nut on your dreadnought and you're looking for a stage instrument that combines outward tradition with great plug-in-ability, then this guitar is hard to fault... it's a posh ride indeed.

The P7DC is a well-mannered dreadnought with a soft attack and a rich, lush sound packed with chiming overtones

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WINNER
Guitar Awards 2014
Guitar Amp Under £1000

REVIEWED
JUNE
25/09

VOX
Night Train 15

Surely everyone needs a low/mid powered 1x12" club-sized combo, and the affordable Night Train 15 has some cool-sounding surprises up its sleeve. This 15W combo has two channels designated Girth and Bright, onboard reverb, and a Celestion G12M Greenback speaker. A Vox VFS2A footswitch can be purchased separately for channel-switching and tone stack bypass, effectively turning the Night Train 15 into a three-channel amp.

Vox clean tones have always been about chewy mids, a slight furriness in the upper mids, and a degree of chime in the treble register. Roll back the treble, boost the middle and engage the Dark switch and the Night Train 15 will take you straight there, while disengaging the Dark switch provides a bit more upper midrange bite along with a hint of sweet overdrive that responds superbly to playing dynamics.

When the Thick switch is engaged you're rewarded with a compressed and valvey grind, sweet harmonic saturation and ample sustain for soloing. It's old-school stuff that will please players who prefer to control things from their guitar.

What struck us when switching to the Girth channel was the difference in dynamic response. Where Thick mode did the fat midrange with saggy dynamics thing, Girth is a good deal punchier and more aggressive, opening the Night Train up to some proper levels of gain, even going into metal territory without any sign of harsh overtones or beating harmonics.

On top of all that the digital reverb is extremely spring-like – so much so that we felt compelled to rock the Night Train back and forth to test for 'spring boing'. It's the icing on an amp capable of covering a remarkably broad range of styles with a very tidy, versatile package of high-quality sounds.

Killer valve tone in a grab-and-go package

PRICE **£718**
CONTACT **Vox Amps**
01908 30463
www.voxamps.com

YAMAHA

THR10X

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

REVIEWED JANUARY 25/04

Dirty tones, clean tones, plenty of effects, a memory, and a spookily huge surround sound: the THR amplifier could be the ultimate practice device. The compact shape, which is only a little longer than the magazine you're holding, suggests it's merely an amp head, but inside those grilles lurk two 8cm speakers – yep, centimetres – that are all the THR10X needs to offer truly impressive tones at home levels.

This model is designed to be the metal-friendly member of the range. Three dials control the EQ, and alongside are a Master Volume, Gain, two effects dials, and two output controls to blend the volume of the guitar with the signal from an MP3 player via the AUX socket. A last dial allows you to select between five modes across three distorted amp models (Power 1&2, Brown 1&2, and Southern Hi), plus clean, bass, or flat options. You can save five user-defined tones, and there's also tap tempo and tuner functions.

The clean sound is cool and crisp, hinting at breakup when you dig in. Up the gain slowly and you're in stinging blues territory. Ramp up the gain and the THR10X screams with menace, and for something so small it has enough low end to make you believe you're playing through a 'real' amp. The tremolos, delays, reverbs, phasers and flangers all sound authentic and give extra depth and sparkle. If you pine for extra features then the USB port offers access to the THR Editor software via your PC. For home usage THR range has hit a bullseye. It's light, visually pleasing, sonically impressive, and fun to play – and it doubles as a classy hi-fi for your mp3 player.

Dirty tones, clean tones, plenty of effects, a memory, and a spookily huge surround sound: the THR could be the ultimate practice device

Plug into the toaster of joy

PRICE **£299**
CONTACT **Yamaha**
0844 811 1116
www.uk.yamaha.com

LINE 6

Amplifi 150

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

REVIEWED MAY 25/08

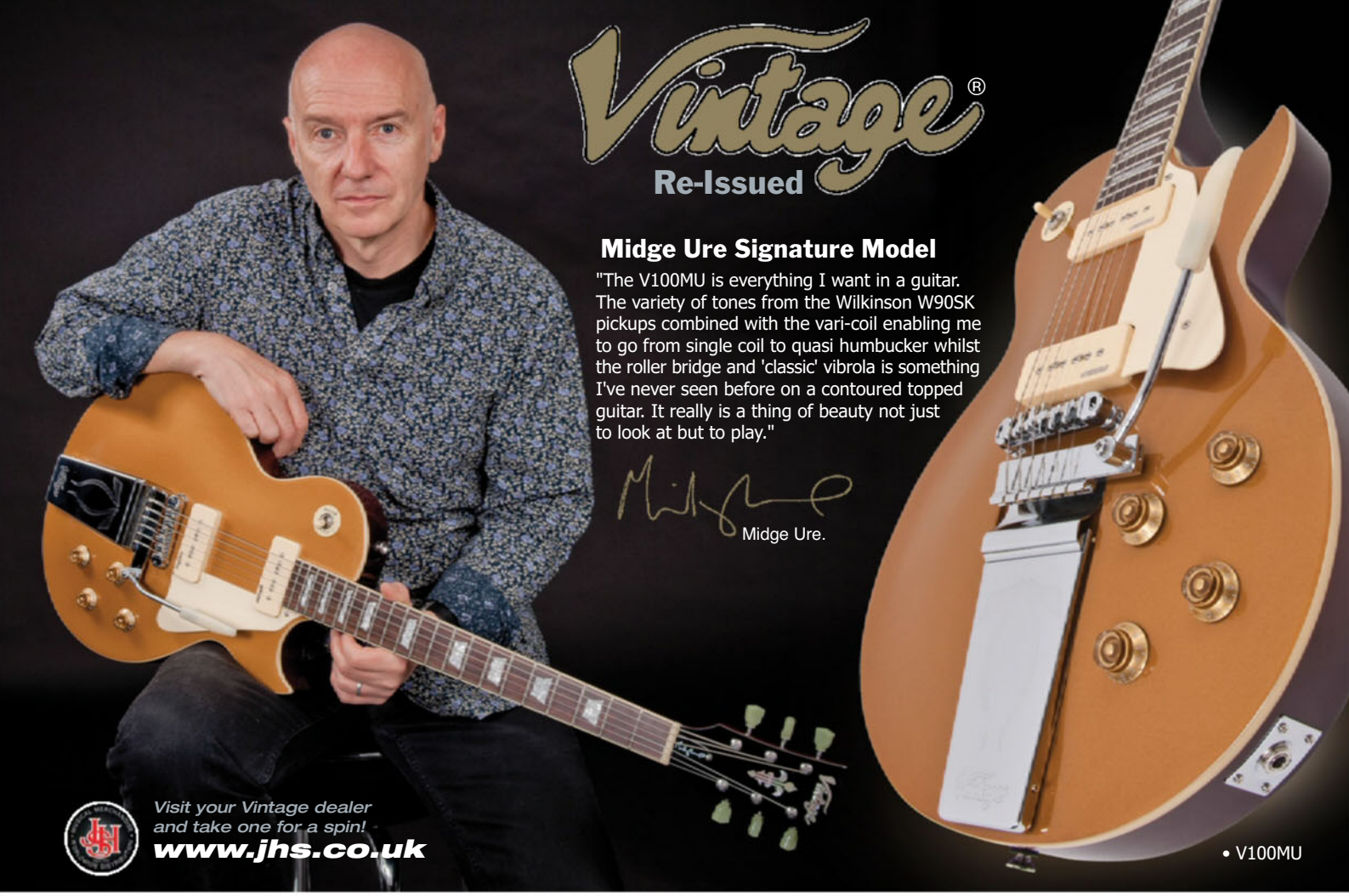
Sometimes you come across an idea that's so staring-you-in-the-face-obvious that you wonder how no one has ever thought of it before. Line 6's Amplifi range is just such a thing, combining a modelling combo with the capability to control your sound and stream audio wirelessly via Bluetooth from your phone or other digital devices – all neatly tucked into a design reminiscent of a high-end hi-fi speaker.

It's a genuine innovation and it sounds great, too. This is thanks to a specially-designed speaker layout that includes a 12" custom Celestion speaker, which gives a glowing account of itself even at gigging levels, plus two high and two mid-frequency drivers. This allows the amp to separate signals into clean and effected ones, giving you a wet/dry stereo output from a single cab – and output is rated at a huge 150W. It's easy to use, but the sticking point is that you will need an expensive iOS device such as the iPod Touch, iPhone, or iPad to unlock its possibilities. With the iOS app installed – a fiendishly simple process– you gain access to over 70 amps, 100-plus effects, and a live editor to control your amp settings from your phone or tablet. There are also cool features such as tone matching, which will analyse a track and search for guitar tones that match it. All the realistic tones of the beloved Pod are present, so playing along with your favourite songs is easy; just hold down the Bluetooth button positioned next to the top control panel, look for the amp on your device, and then once they're connected you can control the tracks remotely. The Amplifi 150 comes loaded with just four presets, but don't worry, there are hundreds available through the Line 6 software. For those already in possession of the necessary iOS device an amp like this could become as all-pervasive as the Pod itself.

Combining a modelling combo with the capability to control your sound and stream audio wirelessly, this is a genuine innovation

The shock of the new

PRICE **£395**
CONTACT **Line 6**
01788 566 566
www.line6.com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TONE KING

Sky King

If you love Tone King's high-end amps but can't decide which one to buy, well... the Sky King does the lot. The company's first amp, the Imperial, was designed to deliver the raw tones and spongy feel of '50s and early '60s Fenders, while lower-powered tweeds and Supro amps inspired the later Falcon model, which had an overdrive tone which was designed to be sweeter, smoother and more rounded. Thanks to its Pentode/Ultralinear switch, the Sky King promises to do both.

Two 6L6s bring the power, all rectified by a mammoth 5U4G valve, while four 12AX7s and a 12AT7 handle preamp, tremolo and reverb duties. The open-back pine cabinet houses a single 12" Celestion G12M-65 Creamback speaker. The circuitry is handwired and the overall finish and build quality corresponds with that of a premium American amplifier. Both lead and rhythm channels have individual attenuator switches, but the Lead channel's versatility comes from the interaction of the Mid-Bite and Tone controls; the latter is capable of taking the midrange from scooped to full, and with Volume and Tone set high, a more contemporary rock edge is easily achievable. The in-between settings run a gamut of classy vintage-style voicings.

The Sky King really is like a collection of fantastic classic amps loaded into one cabinet, and it's remarkable how many sounds can be achieved with such simple controls. Pentode mode covers everything from '50s Fender to early Marshall via the blackface era, while Ultralinear opens up another world of dynamic response and tone voicings. When you factor in a spring reverb that can be subtle or cavernous, a tremolo that you can feel inside your chest, and an award-winning attenuator that would cost around £650 as a stand-alone unit, the Sky King easily justifies its status – and its price tag.

Handwired and super-versatile

PRICE **£2449**
CONTACT **Coda Music**
01438 350 815 or
01582 725 625
www.toneking.com

LAZY J

J35 Combo

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Pete Townshend, Britain's leading windmiller, already owns a bunch of Lazy J combos, and when he requested a 3x10" extension cab for one of them, the results were so impressive that the natural next step was a combo in the same format.

This is amp-building at a genuinely 'boutique' level, with each hand-assembled by Jesse Hoff, a London-based American whose work is favoured by the likes of David Gilmour, Paul Weller, Eric Clapton and that bloke from The Who. The circuitry is based on that of the 1x12" Lazy J 40, with a few tweaks to get the best out of the new speaker configuration. Like the 40, it's available with or without valve-powered reverb and tremolo modules that are attached to the inside of the cab. Our sample has both, as well as the optional footswitch. Power comes from a pair of 6L6s, hanging alongside a GZ34 rectifier, and the speakers are US-made Eminence Legends.

There's a Presence control, a three-way tone stack and Volume controls for the two channels, Bright and Normal, with two inputs for each. Bright volume is a push-pull pot, and pulling it out engages a mids-accentuating gain boost that works on both channels.

Plug into the Normal channel and even at 'barely awake' levels there's an easy, natural feel that makes you think the amp is part of the guitar and the guitar is part of you... you're never far from a perfect tweed tone here. The Bright channel is much more brisk and fiery. There are two switches on the bottom of the chassis. One changes the voltages within the preamp for a slightly harder, more blackface-like sound; the other provides a preamp gain boost, more transparent and less pronounced than the push-pull on the Volume control. Both features will have appeal for connoisseurs of tweediness. As this is about as much money as anyone is ever likely to spend on one amp, the J35 has to be in the highest rank of gorgeous... and luckily, it is.

Even at barely-awake levels there's an easy, natural feel that makes you think the amp is part of the guitar and the guitar is a part of you

Connoisseurs of tweed catered for

PRICE **£2279 for basic model, £2843 as reviewed**
CONTACT **Lazy J Projects**
0843 2894089
www.lazyjprojects.com

GARTONE

Regal 15

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Many great amps have begun life as one-offs. In this case Martin Garton's brief was for an amp that would give British-flavoured sounds from two differently-voiced channels. It needed to work with both humbuckers and single-coils, and it had to have transformer-driven valve spring reverb on both channels. The result is the brand-new Gartone Regal 15.

The 'small British amp' formula combines a low-gain preamp with an easy-to-overdrive output stage. On the Regal 15, the half-power triode setting allows you to get compressed and overdriven tones at lower levels, while full power pentode mode is loud enough for gigging.

Channel 1 has a single gain stage with Volume and a single Tone control before the phase inverter. Channel 2 is based on a 'Plexi' circuit, with controls numbering Volume, Treble, Middle and Bass. Onboard goodies include Mercury Magnetics transformers, a 25W Tayden alnico speaker selected and many more high-end components. As we have come to expect from this builder, the quality of the workmanship and finish is top notch.

The brief to have different voicings for each channel has been met with spectacular success. Put simply, Channel 1 sounds like a non-Top Boost Vox, pushing out a purring full-bodied overdrive thickened by harmonic overtones at higher volumes, while the full-throated roar of Channel 2 sounds just like a Marshall without tinnitus-inducing volume levels and has a wider range of tones. The reverb is a real bonus. It can get fairly cavernous but can also give a well-voiced ambience that adds a 3D quality to clean tones and remains unobtrusive with overdrive. The Regal 15 can go beyond the typical boutique politeness into more brutish tonal territory. Most decent amps will have a sweet spot; with the Gartone Regal 15, we just kept on finding them.

The Regal 15 is a spectacular success. Most decent amps will have a sweet spot but with this Gartone we just kept on finding them

Boutique British sounds on tap

PRICE **£1650 (£1495 with Tayden Ceramic)**
CONTACT **Gartone Amps 07796 682530**
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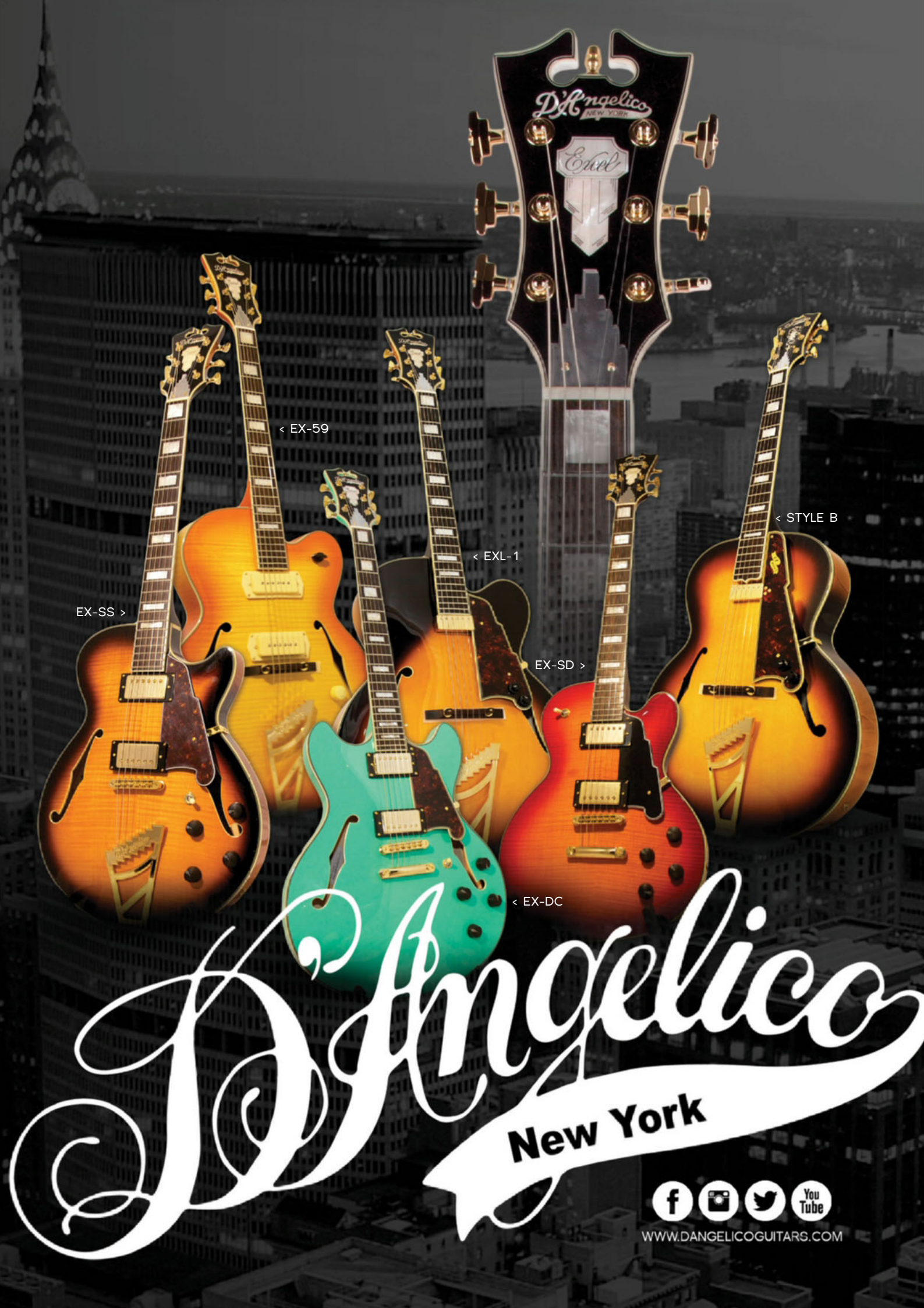
www.gartoneamps.co.uk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DINOSAURAL

OPA-101

Possible future classic?

PRICE **£199**
CONTACT **Dinosaural, 07733 016732**
dinosaural.com

Having designed the much-admired Lovetone, Dan Coggins dropped off the radar for a while. Now he returns with a new stomper, the OPA-101 Overdriven Pre-Amp, based roughly on his Tube Bender but redesigned and with just two controls, Drive and Level, and a secret weapon hidden under a corner of the circuit board: a tiny slider switch for selecting buffered output or hardwired true bypass. Stompboxes are for stomping on, not investing in, but the likely collectability of anything bearing Dan Coggins' fingerprints is just one of the reasons why you should consider taking a closer look at the OPA-101. The main reason is that it sounds glorious.

MXR

Bass Preamp

Tonal medicine

PRICE **£142**
CONTACT **Westside Distribution**
0141 248 4812, www.jimdunlop.com

Some effects-using bass players experience degradation of the most important elements of their bass sound – tone and volume. Luckily there's a solution. These 'tone medicine' pedals come in two forms, boosters and preamps, and those clever MXR people have just added another option to the pantheon of preamps with this fairly awesome piece of kit. It's easy to use, with a musical EQ that allows you to fix tonal wobbles without fuss and also to dial in pretty much any type of sound you need. For those with multiple-FX pedals, this sort of thing is a must-have. The price of £142 undercuts boutique offerings, and the quality justifies the money.

TWINSTOMP

OD-Boost

A great two-for-one offer

PRICE **£225**
CONTACT **TwinStomp, 01746 780984**
www.twinstomp.com

This is arguably the most useful pedal TwinStomp has made yet, offering two distinct effects that sound great individually and work fiendishly well together. Boosters are perhaps at their best when plugged into a valve amp already somewhere in the murky zone between clean and overdriven; in this case the TwinStomp will bully it right into the dirt, effectively adding a new channel. The Overdrive is just as good; turn up the Drive for tight, Marshally powerchords and aggressive lead lines, or combine with the booster to make your drummer run away in tears.

TC ELECTRONIC

Hall Of Fame Mini

Singular delight

PRICE **£159**
CONTACT **TC Electronic**
www.tcelectronic.com

The HOF Mini seems to have been designed for someone with a very clear idea of a single extra reverb they want as an alternative to a basic amp reverb, or someone whose amp doesn't have reverb at all. It certainly works in both situations, and TC Electronics reverbs have a very good reputation, so the price is pretty good for a basic pro reverb. The connectivity and editability are both clever and well-implemented. For the live player the HOF Mini is basically the same as an amp reverb: on/off, more/less. If that's what you're looking for, it does the job... and even if pedalboard real estate is at a premium, you should be able to sneak this one on.

Guitar Awards 2014 Best Effects

EBS

Billy Sheehan Sig Drive

Mr Big time

PRICE **£179**
CONTACT **Sound Technology, 01462 480 000, www.soundtech.co.uk**

After the success of the EBS Signature Wah/Tone Filter bearing the name of Stanley Clarke, for the second offering in this series EBS has got together with Billy Sheehan (Dave Lee Roth, Mr Big, etc) to produce a brand new all-analogue Signature Drive distortion pedal. The BSSD offers various levels and intensities of distortion in a very user-friendly way, blending clean and dirty creates varying textures, and if you tweak the trim pots or use pre-inserts into the loops, you'll expand functionality and versatility. If it's just fuzz you want then £179 may seem a bit steep, but for a high-quality distortion it's a snip.

DOD

Overdrive Preamp 250

Ravishingly retro

PRICE **£89**
CONTACT **Sound Technology 01462 480000, www.dod.com**

Too young to remember DOD pedals from the first time around? Don't worry; DOD reissues, including this 250, allow you to wallow in the sounds of yesteryear. We're particularly big fans of the Gain aspect of this pedal – it's a doorway to a playground of vintage rock and pre-grunge metal tones, and it's spectacular fun. Lead lines are creamy but snarly, chords are huge, and the only thing you might need to do when pushing it – apart from apologising to the neighbours – is stick to the bridge pickup to maintain clarity. Overall, the 250 is a straightforward yet surprisingly versatile overdrive whose appeal goes way beyond nostalgia.

ROTOSOUND

Aftermath delay

Ditch the digital

PRICE **£199**
CONTACT **Rotosound 01732 450838, www.rotosound.com**

Rotosound is one of those great British brands. The innovative string company marketed various rebadged versions of Sola Sound Tone Bender fuzzes, but it was still a surprise when Jason How released six new pedals. All of them were mighty fine, but our favourite, by a smidge, was the Aftermath Analog Delay. Its retro charms produce fantastically warm, lovable results. Push Feedback and Rate to the limit and let the sonic equivalent of a storm build before you use the Rate again to crash the pitch into a wall; lovely. Used more conservatively the Aftermath is great for lead playing, or you can match the repeat level with your guitar output and sculpt hypnotic riffs.

MXR

Custom Shop Phase 99

Phasers set to stun

PRICE **£169**
CONTACT **Westside Distribution 0844 326 2000, www.jimdunlop.com**

Love phasing? Then why limit yourself to just one when MXR offers two, all crammed into a weeny box. There are two rotary speed controls and three buttons that let you toggle between series/parallel mode and modern/vintage tones, and switch the phaser sync on and off. It's full of those familiar great sounds, and beyond the basics you can sculpt all manner of subtle phasing shades. Syncing the phasers creates depth and richness, while controlling the speed of the two units independently lets you programme all sorts of crazy and subtle into your sound. The Phase 99 is ideal if phasing is a key element of your sound and you want control over the fine detail.

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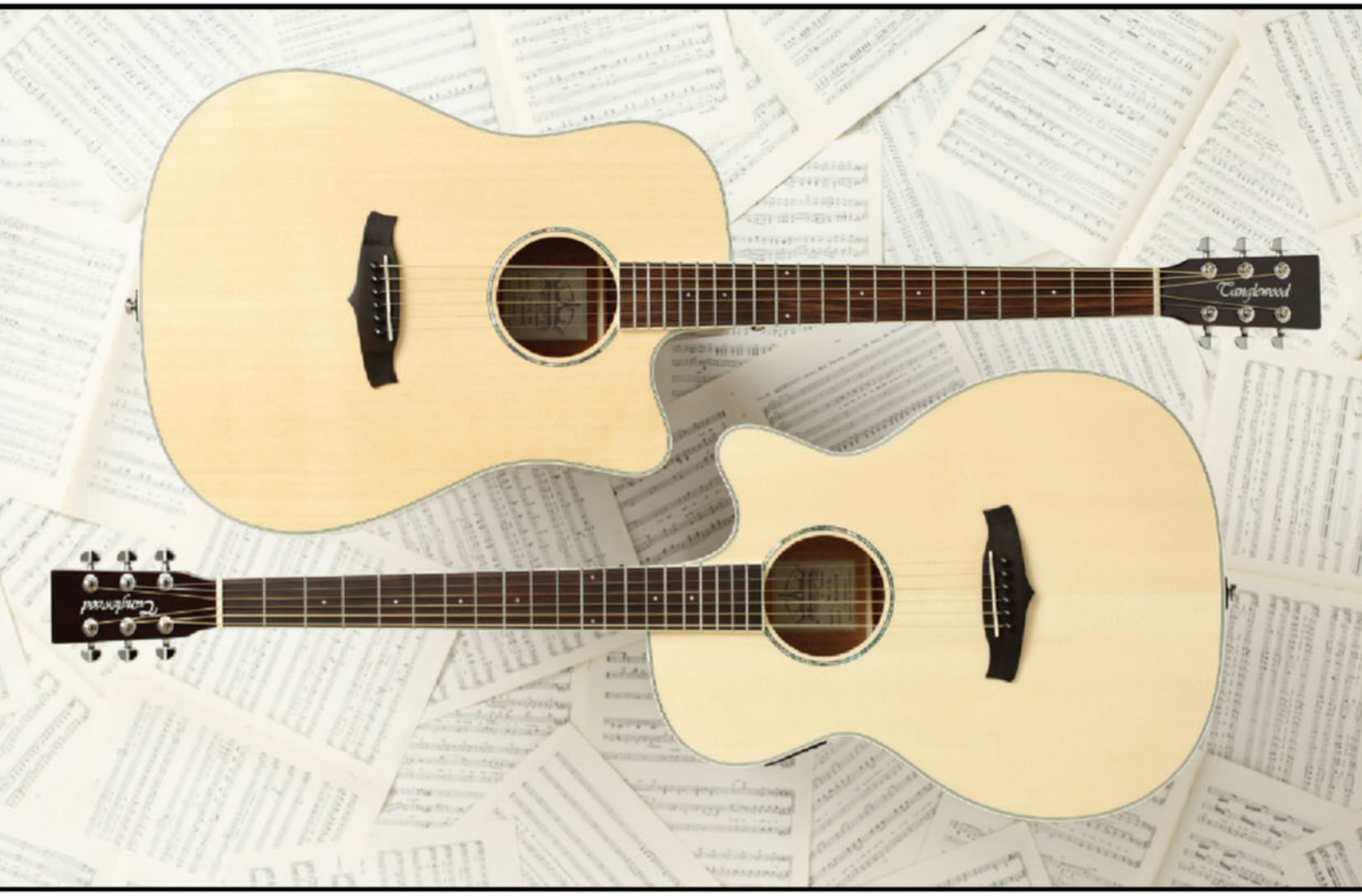
A note from Michael Sanden...

After working with Tanglewood for eight years now, I am still reassured and impressed by their relentless search for improvement and absolute perfection. My latest brief was to develop a bracing system that would release the intricate & delicate tonal character of their solid tops in a similar way to that found on one of my Sanden instruments or any other high end, handmade, boutique guitar.

Our work in this regard has taken almost two years of testing and led us to finally establish the "Tapered Parallel Bracing" system, a design that retains solid structure in all key areas yet enhances the full flexibility of the top and allows the timbers ability to breathe and flow along with the variable attack of the player.

Try this new system in the Premier SE range. In my opinion, this is as good as it gets!

www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

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The Drop polyphonic drop tune pedal gives you down-tuned chunk without having to change guitars. Fast trills and roller-coaster pitch dips are now at the tip of your toes. **www.digitech.com**

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VOX

Tone Garage V8 Distortion

Start your engines

PRICE **£155**
CONTACT **Korg UK**
01908 304601, www.voxamps.com

With extremely striking looks and a real, properly-powered valve grinning through the window, the V8 makes a bold impression on the eyes and the ears. Many may regard distortion as an all-or-nothing thing, and the obvious temptation might be to turn Gain right up from the start, but then you'd miss out on the V8's exceptional range of tones and distortion textures. For example, if you minimise Gain and crank up Vol, the V8 gives you a fairly clean boost with fantastic touch-dynamics and a straight-through tonal quality that we'd associate only with the finest pedals. Buy one and you'll have your fill of fizz-free valvey goodness.

REVIEWED FEBRUARY 25/05

YERASOV

BC-1 Brown Creature

Eastern promise

PRICE **£87**
CONTACT **Yerasov UK**
07534 429269, ww.yerasov.co.uk

This latest offering from the Russian makers may cement Yerasov's reputation around the world. With this Brown Creature Distortion there's no attempt at transparency, even with the Gain down at nine o'clock: just a smooth, thick and frothy distortion. Cranking the gain makes things agreeably metallish, with chords holding their shape and single notes yelling out with an extra layer of harmonic richness. Well designed and built, this Yerasov demands to be stomped on again and again.

REVIEWED MARCH 25/06

EHX

Lumberjack Log Overdrive

Pulling up trees

PRICE **£49**
CONTACT **Electro-Harmonix**
www.ehx.com

The Lumberjack is a wolf in sheep's clothing. It's an effective clean boost which doesn't come with a boutique price tag, and also a very characterful overdrive. The Lumberjack's character is very dependent on your playing dynamic, and the interactive controls can take a bit of getting used to. Leaving the Boost knob at zero and turning the Log knob brings on the grit. It's subtle up to 12 o'clock and then things start to get interesting. There's a sweet spot here where the breakup is very unpredictable, and playing dynamic does indeed control this. And we love the lush, dynamic overdrive it generates at the midpoint, where you can really sculpt your sound.

REVIEWED JULY 25/10

DIGITECH

Bass Whammy

Low-end Whammy fun

PRICE **£175**
CONTACT **Sound Technology**
01462 480 000, ww.soundtech.co.uk

DigiTech's Bass Whammy is not the pedal you will use most on a gig, but it might be the one you play with the most at home and the one that ignites the creative fires. There's lots of great stuff, especially when down-shifting, and the Detune option adds a 3-D feel. Sure, £170 is a fair hit for non-essential kit in hard times, but this is as close to a 'must treat yourself' as you're ever going to get. Great fun... and isn't that important, too?

REVIEWED SEPTEMBER 25/12

Guitar Awards 2014 Best Effects

XVIVE
W2 Fuzz/OD

Overdrive'n'fuzz fun

PRICE **£105**
CONTACT **JHS**
01132 865 381, ww.jhs.co.uk

With so many great overdrive and fuzz pedals around these days, it's really hard to make a choice. This Xvive offers a smart, hybrid solution that's extremely versatile, easy to tweak and capable of delivering an almost unlimited palate of characters and tones. It responds very well to different pickup types, for the most part doesn't obscure an instrument's basic sound, and the signal-to-noise ratio is pretty good even at extreme settings. All up, it delivers a taste of that high-end tone and flexibility, but at a sensible price.

REVIEWED OCTOBER 26/01

3LEAF AUDIO
You're Doom

Dynamic device indeed

PRICE **£180**
CONTACT **Bass Direct**
01926 886433, www.bassdirect.co.uk

Seeking synthy splatter, explosive detonations, sandpaper grind and the sound of an electric hedge-cutter? Truth be told, we probably had a little too much fun with 3Leaf's YD than is strictly legal. In terms of dynamics altering the feel, we found it to be more about your phrasing than weight of playing, but however you approach it there are plenty of excellent variations on tap, from whiney, power-tool lead sounds to gloopy rumbles with various degrees of buzz. Sure, it's at the furthest extent of what some might dream of paying for a fuzz, but the YD is more than good enough to justify the outlay... and much more than just a simple fuzz pedal.

REVIEWED JUNE 25/09

MOOER
Spark Tremolo

Rather Mooer-ish

PRICE **£69**
CONTACT **Strings & Things**
01273 440442, www.mooeraudio.com

This tiny Mooer is a great, value-for-money pedal that can add an extra sound to an already well-populated pedalboard or free up some space. Don't let the size of the controls fool into thinking your options are limited, however. The influence of the Shape control on this tremolo unit is quite subtle with the Depth control set low and, musically, it seems to act more like a tone control. Close to maximum there's a minor gain boost which can add an edge of distortion to the tremolo peak if your amp is already close to the break-up point. Intentional or otherwise, this can be used to great, erm, effect. In conclusion: easy to use and deceptively versatile.

REVIEWED SEPTEMBER 25/12

ZOOM
G1Xon

Home on the multi-range

PRICE **£69**
CONTACT **Zoom UK Distribution**
08432 080 999, www.zoomcorp.co.uk

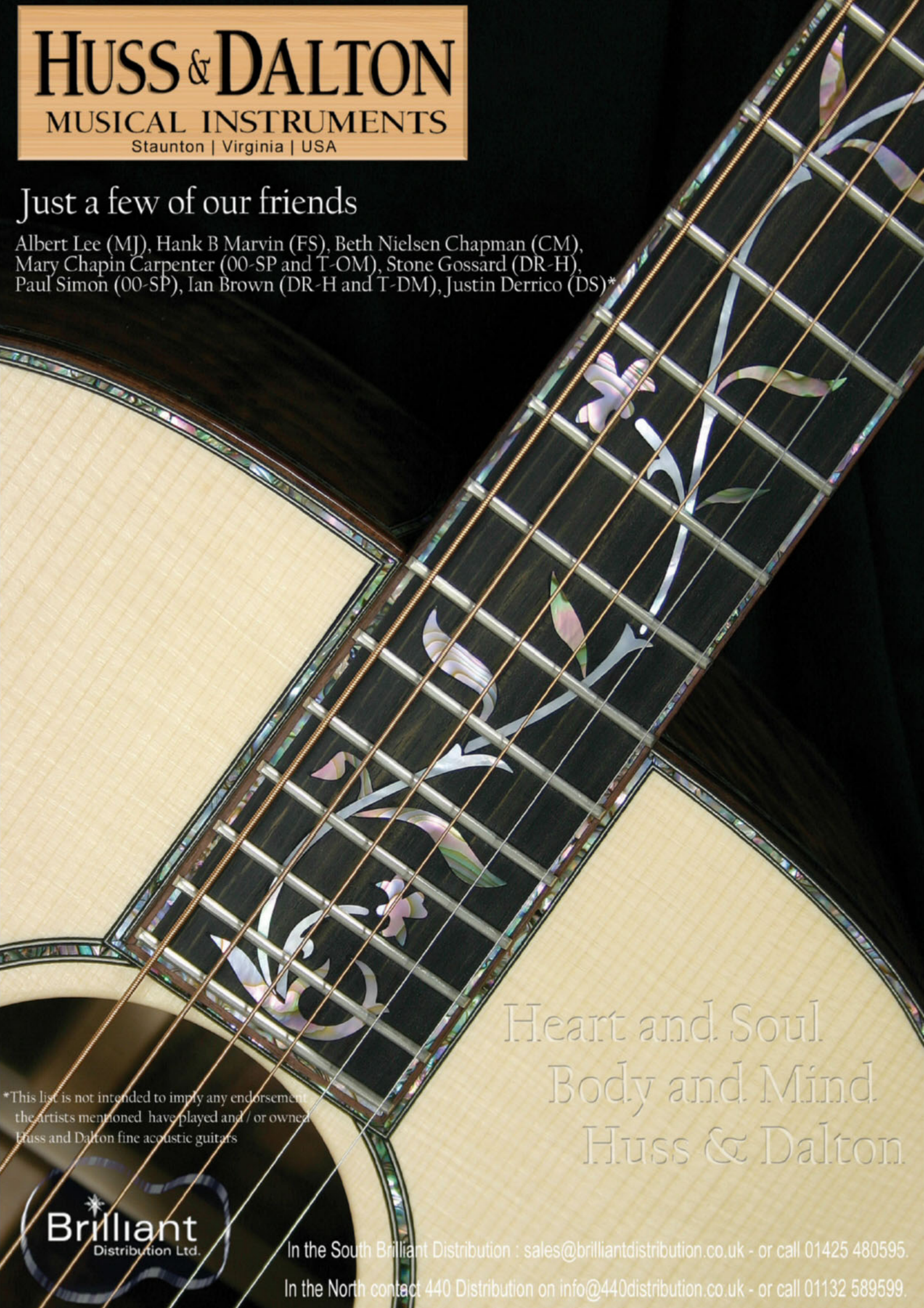
This super-affordable, super-likeable little multi-FX would be great for a beginner, or a more serious player who needs a few multi-style sounds for a covers gig but doesn't want to throw too much cash at it. It's also a great little gadget for practicing and songwriting. The format and editing controls are nice and simple to operate. Bargain!

REVIEWED APRIL 25/07

HUSS & DALTON
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
Staunton | Virginia | USA

Just a few of our friends

Albert Lee (MJ), Hank B Marvin (FS), Beth Nielsen Chapman (CM), Mary Chapin Carpenter (00-SP and T-OM), Stone Gossard (DR-H), Paul Simon (00-SP), Ian Brown (DR-H and T-DM), Justin Derrico (DS)*



*This list is not intended to imply any endorsement the artists mentioned have played and / or owned Huss and Dalton fine acoustic guitars

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Body and Mind
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THE MAN WHO WENT TO HELL, *and came out singing.*

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JAKE WAS A GUITAR PLAYER. BUT THE DAY A CHEMICAL EXPLOSION TOOK HIS RIGHT ARM, PEOPLE STOPPED SEEING JAKE, THE GUITAR PLAYER, AND STARTED SEEING JAKE, THE GUY WHO LOST HIS ARM. THE PROBLEM WAS, THAT WASN'T THE JAKE HE WANTED TO BE. SO, HE MADE THE DECISION TO FIGHT FOR HIS IDENTITY—A BATTLE AGAINST STEREOTYPES, PREJUDICE AND WORST OF ALL, PITY. IT WAS AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK, BUT SOMEHOW, HE LEARNED TO PLAY ALL OVER AGAIN IN A WAY THAT COULD ONLY BE DONE WITH A SPECIAL PROSTHESIS—AND HE DIDN'T STOP THERE. EVENTUALLY HE GOT ENOUGH COURAGE TO GET BACK ON STAGE, WHERE AUDIENCES SAW SOMETHING JAKE WASN'T SURE THEY'D EVER SEE AGAIN. JAKE, THE GUITAR PLAYER. IT'S A STORY THAT INSPIRES US, AND SERVES AS A REMINDER THAT THE WORLD NEEDS MORE PEOPLE LIKE JAKE. FOR MORE ABOUT JAKE AND OTHER STORIES OF PEOPLE WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP FORWARD, *visit taylorguitars.com*

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PRICE: **£654**
CONTACT: **Synergy Distribution**
0121 270 6485
www.synergydistribution.co.uk

REVIEWED JULY 25/10

WINNER
Guitar Awards 2014
Bass Guitar Under £1000

News that a new bass is coming from those Sandberg chaps usually comes with a beaming smile and high expectation of a large dollop of fun, and this latest model in the California series didn't disappoint. The Electra range is Sandberg's attempt to offer a high-quality, no-fuss budget model, and the company chose to outsource various components to other outfits in Japan, Korea, USA and Germany. These are delivered to Braunschweig in Germany for assembly by a small clique of artisans, who employ a cunning computer-controlled Plek station for guaranteed tip-top set-ups, a process often reserved for more expensive models.

With Leo Fender's creations an obvious inspiration, this bolt-on Electra (a winning, well-balanced basswood body/Canadian hard rock maple neck combination) is kitted out with two Sandberg-designed single-coils with alnico V magnets, hooked up to a Sandberg-designed two-band active preamp (although tugging on the knurled chrome Volume knob brings in an optional passive mode).

This bass gets the job done with great versatility, and a little judicial EQ work unearths a tonal quality which massively belies its asking price. Its lively top end is gratifyingly fresh and open with that clarity coming from quality high-mids, while the bottom end is thudding and full of impact. The Electra TT is an excellent introduction to world of Sandberg, and it's possibly the best medium-budget active bass *Guitar & Bass* has come across in the last couple of years. All in all, this is a very welcome addition to the bass fraternity.

GIBSON

EB Bass

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

It's a Gibson, but not as we know it

REVIEWED MARCH 25/06

PRICE **£779**
CONTACT **Gibson UK**
020 7167 2144
www.gibson.com

In recent times we've been treated to a steady flow of Gibson basses based on models ostensibly from the '70s, such as the Krist Novoselic RD. All well and good, but it doesn't look like Gibson has done anything to advance the concept behind their basses for decades. However, 2014 was different – and this brand-new EB Bass is proof positive. It's certainly different-looking, although it easy to trace the inspiration: the bottom half is much like a Gibson RD bass, while the top half – and the forearm chamfer and ribcage cut – takes its main cues from a Precision. Overall, it's an interesting and appealing design.

The EB sounds fat and growly with solid mids and a zingy high-mid sheen that almost heads in the direction of a StingRay. The result? If this is not the best bass that Gibson has produced for a very long time – or ever, in fact – it's certainly its most versatile. It's traditional without being dated and it's great fun to play, with plenty of practical variations on tap. And let's consider the price... a Gibson bass, made in the USA, for less than £800? Are they mad? Well, if you're looking for a top-notch passive bass to act as a stylish workhorse, you'd be mad not to try Gibson's new EB.

One of the best basses Gibson has made for a long time, the EB is traditional without being dated and it's great fun to play

PEERLESS

B2 Bass

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Sleek and tightly wound

REVIEWED MAY 25/08

PRICE **£999**
CONTACT **Peerless Guitars**
07838 667 630
www.peerlessguitars.eu

The new B2 is based on the Retromatic 'P' Series guitar with a centre-block maple body and a 17th fret neck/body join. Its genesis, we're informed, is the result of 'numerous requests from bass players who liked the styling of the guitar'. Peerless have delivered the goods – and then some. For the pickups they turned to Matt Gleason at Monty's Guitars of London, and he provided the specs for a pair of humbuckers with shiny chrome covers, both wound hotter than normal. Six Varitone positions with three possible pickup settings each equals a dizzying 18 different starting points.

To give you a basic idea of the B2's tonal possibilities, turn both pickups on and the sound is bright and chimey with zingy, slightly nasal highs, a pleasing snarl from the E string and plenty of harmonic life. The neck pickup is earthier and smoother with a rootsy blues edge, although still throaty on the E string, and the bridge is tight and burpy with good width and sharp, snappy highs, and funkier than you'd expect from its art deco looks... and that's just for starters. The Retromatic B2 is a welcome addition to the ever-increasing range of semi-hollowbody basses on the market. It's well put together and extremely handsome; we reckon the B2 will appeal to guitar-driven pop bands as well as those of a rootsier disposition, but that's not all it'll do by a long chalk.

Handsome and well put together, the B2 will appeal to guitar-driven pop bands and those of a rootsy disposition

FEATURES:

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www.ashdownmusic.com

NS
CR5 Radius Bass

Still head of the class

REVIEWED APRIL 25/07

PRICE: **£2149**
CONTACT: **House Music Ltd**
01276 453 079
housemusic@btconnect.com
www.nedsteinberger.com

There are very few people who deserve a place at the very top table of bass design – the game-changers, the designers and the inspired individuals whose innovations became globally accepted as standard – but Ned Steinberger is definitely one of them. The man who gave us that iconic, headless and wood-free wonder the L-2 is once again exploring the solidbody bass guitar. While the L-2's minimal form gave traditionalists an easy target, the Radius is a different kettle of fish. It's still headless, sure, but the sleek, curvaceous, double-cutaway maple body has a sumptuous flamed maple top that gives it a new high-end classiness. The three pickup settings and Polar piezo combinations are going to give a lot of variation, and it's especially interesting to combine each magnetic setting with its piezo blend version.

In twin pickup mode the Radius is big and brash with a solid bottom end, a slightly snarly midrange and highs that are bright and zingy, if a little high-mid biased. Blending in the Polar pickup sanitises the sound; the definition is still excellent but now the tone has lost the zingy high-mid sheen – a nicely even, controlled setting for pop exploits. NS took plenty of time in putting the CR5 together, and not a single millisecond has been wasted. It's a wonderful instrument that manages to look cooler than a headless bass has any right to, and the piezo/magnetic mixture produces effectively three basses: a bit of an animal with the magnetics, more polite and refined when blended, or earthy and thudding in piezo mode. The neck isn't super-slim but it's very comfortable and contributes to the feeling of a bass that demands to be played, while the self-clamping tuning system is fantastic. Of course, the £2000-plus price tag is up in the professional echelon, but we think it's worth every penny.

MTD
Kingston Z5

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Lightweight five-stringer

PRICE **£1090**
CONTACT **Bass Direct**
01926 886433
www.bassdirect.com

REVIEWED AUGUST 25/11

Michael Tobias's MTD basses are high-end, but the import Kingston line offers the same elements for a lot less lolly. The KZ5 re-imagines a melange of classic forms but still creates a distinct identity: the Z5 has a mahogany/burled maple body, active electronics and a bolt-on maple neck with an asymmetrical profile. When you first pick the KZ5 up you'll be pleasantly surprised by how light it is – just over 3.5kg/8lbs, which feels genuinely featherweight compared to many others. In terms of feel the Kingston Z5 is a joy to play. Tonally, it has pretty much everything you need on hand, and all its sounds are easy to find. If you want a good basic sound then try selecting the neck pickup and boosting the mids, plus just a touch of bass and treble. It's reminiscent of the fat, snarly Billy Sheehan sound on Dave Lee Roth's *Eat 'Em And Smile* album, especially *Yankee Rose*... and that's no bad thing. The B string is really excellent, and no matter what you do EQ-wise it retains enough definition and focus. Overall the KZ5 is a well-made and visually appealing bass, and if you have to save for a couple of months longer to bring it within your reach, it'll probably be worth the wait.

The MTD KZ5 is a well-made and visually appealing bass. In terms of feel it's a joy to play and all its sounds are easy to find

SANDBERG
California MarloweDK 5-String

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Superb signature sounds

PRICE **£1899**
CONTACT **Synergy Distribution**
0121 270 6485
www.synergydistribution.co.uk

REVIEWED JULY 25/10

When your tuition videos have received over 25 million clicks on YouTube, as is the case with Danish bassist/tutor Thomas Risell, better known as MarloweDK, surely the minimum you deserve is a signature instrument. Sure enough, Risell approached Sandberg looking for an updated version of his 30-year old Jazz Bass, and the German manufacturer duly obliged.

The DK5 adheres to the same principle as the four-string model which debuted in 2012, but this time it comes with an extra-long 35" scale form to ensure that this passive-powered bass squeezes the most out of its B string. In twin pickup mode the DK5 sounds very 'classic single-coil', but with plenty of practical bottom end. The altered pickup positioning has helped produce a noticeably warmer, more retro-sounding bass, and the B string sounds sweetly focused. Chop back the tone and this bass moves towards reggae, blues or trad roots music, while just before full cut is warm and woolly, making you want to give it a big hug. Within the context of familiar styling Sandberg very much follow their own path, making classy, practical, and reliable basses. The MarloweDK is all those things, and it provides that old-school bass sound with the addition of a worthy B-string; it's a top-notch traditional-sounding passive bass, especially if you're a fan of aged finishes.

Sandberg makes classy, practical basses, and this one provides that old-school sound with the addition of a worthy B string

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ARTIST: JOE ROBINSON

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BOSS

WINNER
Guitar Awards 2014
Best Bass Amp

REVIEWED JANUARY 25/04

EBS
Classic Session 120

In this great era of bass amp manufacturing, with all the power, dynamics, options (not to mention the every-growing lightweight gear) on offer, there's still something to be said for a great all-rounder that gets the job done with the minimum of fuss. The EBS Classic Session 120 is a fine unit. It's compact, weighs 21kg/46lbs, and delivers a good variety of sounds. Stylistically it'll get you anywhere you seek to go, as it has a naturally pleasing sound and, with a welcome addition of some cabinet-induced bottom end, a good reproduction of your bass' acoustic tone. It deals with a five-string's low B well – no distortion, excellent definition and a decent booty level. The core of the note is solid and punchy with plenty of impact, and as you move across the fingerboard your bass will speak sweetly.

The 120's flat EQ sound is good, but if you want nasty and noisy just wind the Treble knob to anywhere from half-boost upwards and you'll get more finger-click and clanky fret-noise than you'll know what to do with. As for the midrange, the parametric selector is really useful: move it towards the 500Hz centre for more rasp with a gunning, barky quality at the bottom end and more presence and stature – a good place for competing with multiple guitars. You can also find the classic burpy thing, but it feels like an element that contributes to the whole tone rather than one which overruns and ransacks it. Add up the facts that the EBS is affordable, that it has a useful built-in tilt-back facility, comes with plenty of sturdy sonic options and also has a cool, classy look, and this 120W 1x12" combo starts to look very appealing.

High-quality session chops

PRICE **£399**
CONTACT **Sound Technology**
01462 480000
www.soundtech.co.uk

Guitar Awards 2014 Best Bass Amp

AGUILAR

Tone Hammer 500

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

REVIEWED MARCH 25/06

Twenty years ago we'd consider 30kg a reasonable weight, but new power technology means that you can reduce your gig night payload by over 80 per cent. Aguilar's diminutive TH500 head rams this point home by weighing in at a sensationally featherlight 1.8kg/4lbs. Built in the US, not China, this amp has a solid state preamp and a class D power section, and trust us, both this and the SL112 cab we tested with it are top-notch pieces of gear.

Overall we'd say the TH500 lies slightly on the vintage side as opposed to modern, with a very true-sounding tone with lots of clarity across the spectrum. It's easy to dial up a variety of sounds, and the EQ – bass and treble, plus a parametric mid section – is well-organised and highly musical. The Gain knob lets you add in some tasty grind, while Drive isn't really drive, as such... it's more of an old-school closed-cab tone shaper, lifting the bass and attenuating treble as you wind it up. With EQ set flat, the little Aguilar delivers an excellent rendition of your bass' acoustic sound – nicely detailed with plenty of bottom end and a growling edge, a solid midrange that's bright and punchy, and fully-realised highs. The upper mids are a little forward, but add some lower mids and you're in thump heaven. It's not the cheapest on the block, but the Aguilar is a totally professional-feeling – and sounding – amp.

Aguilar's TH500 is sensationally featherlight, and while not the cheapest 500W head on the block it feels and sounds totally professional

Trip the light fantastic

PRICE **£749**
CONTACT **Barnes & Mullins**
01691 652 449
www.bandm.co.uk

ASHDOWN

MAG Rootmaster RM-220

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

REVIEWED OCTOBER 26/01

Ashdown has been hitting us with good stuff in terms of bass amps and bass pedals for over 17 years, and the UK company continues this fine tradition with the RM-220. Weighing a slightly hefty 7.7kg/17lbs thanks to a power section that's solid-state, not switchmode (unlike the more powerful RM-420) and shoving out a useful 220W into four ohms, the RM's un-EQ'ed sound is natural and realistic. If you're looking for scooped mids, there's a nicely smooth and glassy sound available via the Shape button. The EQ is sensibly sorted, so when you dial in Bass the degree of fat rumble you attain is big but not overpowering, and it doesn't kill note definition. Boosting all three tone controls about a third produces a wicked finger-funk tone that's tight and snappy with plenty of body. Of the other features, the compression is natural-sounding and transparent, the blendable Drive knob awakens a chocolatey fuzz monster, and the Sub feature is a decent octaver that'll add synthiness or thickness if needed. The RM-220 is stylish and unfussy amp, and everything is there for a great reason. The construction is rugged and it should comfortably withstand the sort of abuse likely to come its way... and it's also splendid value for money.

The solid-state RM-220 is a stylish, unfussy amp with a blendable Drive knob and a thickness-adding Sub feature. It's splendid value for money

Stylish bass bedrock

PRICE **£299**
CONTACT **Ashdown Engineering**
01245 441155
www.ashdownmusic.com

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Photo: Mike Hough

Guitar Stories

Be it telling tales on stage, ruling the radio waves or laying down some heavy blues, it's clear that when it comes to Randy Bachman we ain't seen n-n-nothing yet. Interview by **Michael Heatley**

Say the name Randy Bachman to a rock fan and you'll get an immediate response: 'Bachman-Turner Overdrive, *You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet*'. Say the name to a guitarist, and it's just as likely they'll come back with 'Mister Gretsch'. *Guitar & Bass* featured Randy's collection of Gretsches 10 years ago in a *Private Collection* feature. Now those instruments, 385 in total, are set to emerge into the public gaze in Nashville, as Fred Gretsch bought them and has donated them to the County Music Hall of Fame.

'Gretsch was the "country" guitar,' comments Randy, 'and Nashville is the place for them to be. I look forward to seeing them all again as they were my friends for decades. I took them home and restored them with original parts, but I had nowhere to put them; they were all in cases. It's a bit like having books in a library when the library is closed. It makes more sense to have them on the wall like paintings.' Books, photos and even trading cards are being prepared to accompany the imminent unveiling – and while Bachman is still missing 'a really great single-cut White Falcon now worth $75,000', he's surely much heavier of pocket.

It all began when his original orange Gretsch 6120, used on the Guess Who's version *Shakin' All Over* and BTO's *Takin' Care Of Business,* was stolen. Bachman acquired another that was just two serial numbers away, but in the course of trying to reclaim the original he became known as a Gretsch expert... even though he had yet to earn the title. 'I sent letters and faxes to shops, and I would buy every Gretsch they had as a trade-in, so I had six, then 12, then 20, then hundreds. Fred Gretsch came to me and said, "You've got my museum – can I buy it?"

'People used to call me up for advice on what a Gretsch they were thinking of buying should look like, and I used to walk down to my basement and describe the whole guitar – the pickups, the dots, the tuners, where the horseshoe should be, . They'd say "What do we owe you?" and I'd say "nothing" – then they'd send me a Gretsch ukulele or an organ, even an ocarina.

'Gretsch put things out during the war when people were leaving New York in battleships. He'd give them army-green ukuleles to play on the boat. The electronic organs were like harmonicas; you plugged them in and the air blew over the pipes almost like a electric accordion. Someone I helped gave me one when he sold four or five Gresches and made money on them.

'There was all kinds of weird paraphernalia, like strings that came in a little carousel that spun around like a Lazy Susan. There were eight strings in a package with a spare high B and E. The idea was you could put on lighter strings, a B for a G, then start bending notes like Chuck Berry without buying extra strings. They came in a beautiful round plastic case like a woman's make-up case, and you could put your picks in it.

"I had hundreds of Gretsches. Fred Gretsch said, "You've got my museum. Can I buy it?"'

Gear

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Gibson Les Paul and ES-137 plus, for the latest project, assorted Supros and Danelectros

Amps
Fender amplification

Effects
Two Rolling Blues overdrives and a volume-wah pedal

From Randy's famous Gretsch collection: a Round-Up...

Synchromatic archtop

A classic G-brand 6120

A gold sparkle Duo-Jet

Gretch Rancher flat top

The whole memorabilia thing was great! Guys would send me posters, banners and clocks from the stores, and I ended up with all this stuff.'

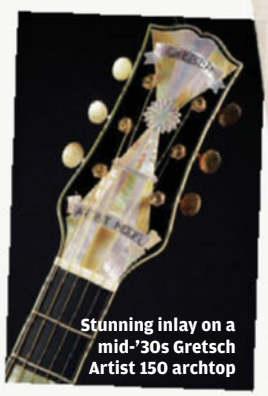
Randy now has a second career as a broadcaster and is celebrating his ninth year on CBC radio. Each two-hour show every Saturday night celebrates a theme: it could be motorcycle songs, songs with women's names as their title, or classic tracks played by certain guitars. 'I'd explain the difference between the guitars, and explain the evolution of Telecaster into the Strat. I started to win awards for the radio show, so I took a bunch of guitars on the road and toured it.

'I went to see Ray Davies in London maybe 15 years ago when he did *Storyteller*, and Ray said, "You could do a show like this. You've got your hits – tell the stories." So I picked six of my hits for the Guess Who and six for BTO and the show became *Every Song Tells A Story*. Some songs took years to evolve and some took minutes, so it's a combination of the radio shows and my own songs – now it's a DVD.' That DVD and CD package is doing very well, and went triple platinum in Canada before worldwide release. 'We don't do the whole song, or the evening would be four hours long! It's very civil sitting down and reading stories; it varies each night, like you're telling kids a bedtime story. It's given me a second career.'

> *'Neil Young said to me, "Do something new. I reinvent myself every 18 months..."'*

These days Bachman uses a Gibson semi-acoustic and a Les Paul for the rockier material, putting these through a hired backline, usually a Fender Deluxe or Twin Reverb. 'I set everything at noon – treble, bass, mid – and get the rest from my pedalboard and my guitar. I have a volume-wah, and two Rolling Blue overdrive pedals. When I'm claw-picking on jazzy stuff like *Lookin' Out For Number One, Blue Collar*, stuff like that, I shut the pedals off to get a good, clean sound.'

He may have turned 70 last year but the ebullient Bachman shows little sign of slowing down. His next project is an album of original blues songs, recorded with a female band. 'It was the most fun I ever had,' he enthuses. Running into old pal Neil Young at the Nashville Musicians Hall of Fame was the catalyst; 'Neil asked what I was going to do next. When I said "maybe a blues album", Neil said "Don't do something old and call it a new album – challenge yourself, do something new. Be fearless; I reinvent myself every 18 months!" So I came home and met the head of True


Stunning inlay on a mid-'30s Gretsch Artist 150 archtop

HOFNER HEAVEN

Look out world – Mister Gretsch is about to become Mister Hofner. 'After I sold the collection I got given a German archtop guitar. I googled it, and then and started to collect German archtops: Hoyers, Hofners and Hopfs, made from the late '50s to the early '60s. They got wiped out when Gibson, Guild and everybody else started making archtops. I now have 200 of these and a friend has 150, and we're going to do a book called *German Archtops*. Some of them are amazing – they were made one at a time by a father and son hiding in cellars, basements and attics behind the Iron Curtain. They sold them on the black market to get extra food to feed the family.

'They were one of a kind, all hand-carved, but all have the same hardware. The bodies and the f-holes looked like triangles or lightning bolts. They are the most gorgeous guitars – look up Hopf and Hoyer on German eBay.

'*Guitar Aficonado* magazine did a spread on my German archtops, so I'm getting a lot of interest. I've got one of every one there is. Once my mid-life crisis is over, you have a one-of-a-kind collection and you can publish it. I could probably sell half the collection and get all my money back!'

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BACHMAN-TURNER OVERDRIVE
Not Fragile (1974)
BTO's third album was a US chart-topping success in 1974 thanks to *Roll On Down The Highway* and the inevitable *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet*

BACHMAN & TURNER
Bachman-Turner (2010)
Recorded in 2010, this vintage-sounding reunion of the two main men of BTO could equally well have been a classic made in the '70s

RANDY BACHMAN
Every Song Tells A Story (2014)
Bachman parades his songwriting talents to an ecstatic theatre audience; standing room only, but at least he's sitting down. Available as CD or DVD

Photo: Mark Maryanovich
Randy with his custom Gibson ES137 with Stetsbar vibrato

North Records, a great Canadian label, who offered the backing to "do something strange".

'A year ago I saw *Tommy: The Musical* in Stratford, Ontario, and sat beside Pete Townshend. Pete said how good the [pit] drummer was; I looked in the programme and said "Pete... I think it's a girl." He said, "It can't be, they're playing just like Keith Moon," so afterwards we went backstage. It was Dale Ann Brendon, who has her own drum school and plays with the London Symphony Orchestra in Toronto. I wanted to do an album with me on guitar and her on drums but with a girl bass player, to be different from White Stripes. At the Junos last March in Winnipeg I saw a country band called Ladies Of The Canyon – four ladies who played like Crazy Horse in plaid shirts and ripped jeans! Anna Ruddick, the bass player, has a degree in standup jazz bass and plays in a blues band to make money.

'I needed a producer, so I emailed Kevin Shirley, Joe Bonamassa's producer, who I'd known since the early '90s. He said, "I only have three weeks off in the next two years, but I'll produce your album if you do everything I tell you to. I'll make you do 45 takes until I get one that makes the hair stand up on my neck. I'll push you like you've never been pushed."

'Dale Ann brought in four drum kits and Anna brought in four basses and I used guitars like Supros and Danelectros through old Silvertone amps. I wanted a Jack White/Dan Auerbach sound, nothing like me at all. The old guitars restrict your playing: some have 20 frets, some have 18 frets, it's a different scale. You can't bend the strings, so you have to play a different style – and so I wrote a different style. I left out middle eights that were very Beatles-y, I took six-chord songs and made them two-chord songs, and out of it came a new, raw, bare-bones skeleton me. I didn't do any old blues songs – I kept writing new songs, taking old templates and making new songs.

'It's like the late-'60s British Invasion of Cream, the Who, Led Zeppelin. Bass, drums, guitar and vocal. Kevin got Joe Bonamassa to play on a couple, plus Peter Frampton, Billy Gibbons and Scott Holiday of Rival Sons – he's like the new Jimmy Page. I've got some live performances of my friend Jeff Healey; his widow has given me permission to fly him into a song we played together but never recorded.'

The album, *Heavy Blues*, credited simply to 'Bachman', is coming out in March. 'I haven't heard it as Kevin's taken it away to mix,' Randy reveals. 'Everything was done live in two or three takes and he's comping them together. He's the captain of my ship... he says he's taking it somewhere it's never sailed before. I grew up playing the blues in Winnipeg, and Neil Young. I played blues and country because it was evolving into rock'n'roll when it got a backbeat. So I'm revisiting these blues roots of mine – getting out the old 45s and 78s, the records my mum's younger sisters used to have, stuff by Bobby Blue Bland and BB King.

'BB was like Clapton or Hendrix when he was young. Now he's mellow and laid-back, but he was a tiger when he was in his twenties and thirties – he inspired me. I wanna be like this guy before it's too late. I really wanna do this album.'

And another thing...

The Bachman-Turner show rolls on – well, occasionally. 'We played the Ohio State Fair with Blue Öyster Cult and Foghat last weekend,' says Randy, 'and it was great!'

MEET THE ANCESTORS

Randy recently featured on Canadian TV's version of the genealogy show *Who Do You Think You Are*. He went to Germany, taking children and grandchildren with him, wondering if his search might reveal a connection to composer Johann Sebastian Bach. It didn't – but he did find some interesting ancestors. Randy's forebears were Friedrich Bachmann and Sabine Stefan, and the Stefans were – guess what? – instrument makers...

'It went back to the 1400s to a little town in Germany, to a guy who made instruments and a guy who was a wandering minstrel who went from town to town playing for food... so that was very touching. I was in a church dating from 1492 where he'd played, and we did one of his songs with my daughter on the organ and me on guitar. We really felt ghostly vibes when we were playing; Lorelei and I were both in tears.

'The town had a population of maybe 250 people; people left as teenagers and then retired back there. People took us into their homes and cooked for us; they were all farmers.'

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Steph

Photo: Mike Prior

Atlantic Crossing

Birmingham's ocean-hopping blues singer and guitarist returns with a soulful, rocking album, her own label and a fresh band in tow. Interview by **Michael Heatley**

Joanne Shaw Taylor has finally made up for lost time. Discovered at the age of 16 by Eurythmic Dave Stewart, it took her seven years to open her account with *White Sugar* in 2009. With the September unveiling of *The Dirty Truth*, the Birmingham belle now has four studio albums to her name, plus a live effort that slipped out late last year.

She returned to Memphis-based *White Sugar* producer Jim Gaines for *The Dirty Truth* – and the reunion confirmed how much she has progressed. 'It's hard to define yourself with your first album, and I was very proud of it, but I think looking back I still had a lot of growth to do as an artist,' she considers.

'*Diamonds In The Dirt*, the second album, is slightly darker, a bit heavier. I listened to it today for the first time in two years and I think it's got some of the strongest songs I've written on it. It was something of a crossover album...a stepping stone between *White Sugar* and *Almost Always Never*, which was an experiment seeing what sort of songs I could write, a mixture of genres.

'It's almost come full circle with this album, which is a really nice tie-up of the previous three. It's got some stronger songs on it, it's still got guitar and it's quite rootsy and stripped-back and it's got the type of songs I'm known for now as well – soul ballads and a mixture across the board.'

Vocal takes were done very quickly, reflecting the fact that Joanne's become more comfortable with her voice. 'I know what it can and can't do,' she says. 'I wear three different hats – singer, songwriter, and guitarist – and I've got to the point where I write songs that suit my guitar playing and also my voice. I think that hopefully shows.'

All nine compositions were written specifically for the record, save for two. '*Shiver And Sigh* is a song that never seemed to work on any of the other albums,' she confides. 'It was written when I was about 18, with Kevin Bowe. He's from Minneapolis and he's worked with guys like Jonny Lang and Kenny Wayne Shepherd. We did five or six songs, but the only ones released are *Shiver And Sigh* and [*Almost Always Never*'s] *Piece Of The Sky*.' The other 'old' song was *Feels Like Home*, omitted from *White Sugar* in favour of the similarly Hendrix-y *Kiss The Ground Goodbye*.

Not only does Joanne have a new release to promote, she has a new label and a new band. 'My manager and I decided to start a record label, Axehouse Music, which the album is coming out on. I've been based in the States for about five years now, but my manager's in the UK and we decided to start the company here. We're spending more time in the UK and Europe this year, so the best thing to do was to go with a UK band. We'll take them to the US and Australia as opposed to having a US band we bring here.' ➔

'I've got to the point where I write songs that suit my guitar playing and also my voice'

Gear

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Gibson Les Paul and Fender Telecaster

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Taylor's current bandmates – drummer Oliver Perry, keyboard player Joe Leadbeater and bassist Tom Godlington – were discovered by Joanne's front-of-house soundman and will be her full-time band from now on. 'They're young guys from Sheffield, aged around 22 or 23. We decided to try things out, so I flew over to Sheffield for a few days' rehearsals and it really clicked... which is good, 'cos were going to spend a lot of time together! I just loved their energy, and they're super-young. I border a little bit on the rocky side anyway, so we clicked. They all knew each other, though I think this is the first time they've all played together.'

> *'A lot of work goes into the albums, but at the end of the day it's about the live show'*

Guitar-wise, Joanne confirms her permanent switch to the Les Paul that happened on the last studio album. 'We were recording *Almost Always Never* and had a track called *Tied And Bound*, which was quite a heavy song. We needed that "Les Paul and Marshall stack" sound for it, and fortunately Gibson had a dealership in Austin.' But her old flame has been wooing her back, and the dirty truth is she's now two-timing. 'I've gone back to the Telecaster for the first time in a year. There are just some sounds you need a Tele for...'

Amp-wise, the position's simpler. 'On this album were doing what we've always done at Jim [Gaines]'s and just used one Fender Bassman. When we were doing *White Sugar* I had a chat with Jim one day about Albert Collins, who he once worked with, and who's always been one of my big influences. Jim said Albert used the Bassman in the studio and whacked everything up to 10. We tried it, and it sounded so good we stuck with it.'

Effects-wise a Fulltone Supa-Trem was employed on *Tried Tested And True*'s solo, while two overdrives – a Mojo Hand Rook and the TS9 Tubescreamer she's owned since she was 15 – are the major players.

While Paul Jones' Radio 2 *Blues Show* has always been supportive Joanne has just cut two live sessions for him, and the fact that the Planet Rock A-listed *Mud, Honey* ahead of the album's release made her year. 'I never thought we would get that, and it's also quite rare for someone in my genre to get it. So the fact they have come on board has been huge for me.

'When I listen to that album, my biggest issue, if there is an issue, is that I tend to do a lot of styles within one genre – particularly when it comes to the songwriting. On this album there's tracks like *Mud, Honey, Outlaw Angel* and *Struck Down*, but there's also *Fool In Love* and *Tried, Tested And True*, poppier soul stuff I love playing – and I can't imagine that would ever get played on Planet Rock [laughs]. It would be interesting to see if more mainstream radio stations pick up on that side of things.'

Producing a new record every 18 months or so keeps her in the media spotlight, but Joanne's under no illusions as to how she makes her living. 'In the genre I'm in, our bread and butter is touring – the album is a necessity to promote the tours and keep them going. That's not to say we're blasé about what albums we put out, a lot of work

Girls Plug In

Comparatively few girls and young women take up the electric guitar – and the fact Joanne has started to see more females at her shows is hopefully a sign she's something of a role model. 'When I started gigging I was 16, and it was obviously a big novelty,' she remembers. 'At the time I put it down to my age, and I realised when I was 21 and it was still a novelty that it wasn't cos I was teenage; it was because I was female. Because my dad played guitar, my brother played guitar and I played guitar, I never really thought about it. I always tried to keep up with the boys!

'I've noticed in the 14 years from when I started to now that there have been a lot more female guitarists – like Chantel McGregor, Sam Fish and Donna Grantis, who was on Ruf and is now playing with Prince. They are slowly coming through, and I've also started being introduced to more female drummers, another male-dominated world.

'Most electric guitar players are quite aggressive when compared to Joni Mitchell, Ani DiFranco, that sort of acoustic world... so maybe women don't by and large identify with that. But they are coming through more, and I've always said that one day there'll be a guitar-player who will come along and dominate the scene. I think the player to come through in a decade or two will be a female. We need that one female artist to come through that's so good she blows all the boys out of the water, inspires young girls to pick it up. I think we're getting closer to that day.

'I find it odd that you get a lot of online comments like "If you like Joanne you need to check out Sam Fish, or this girl, or that girl". Well no, you don't! I love Sam's playing, but – and I've talked to her about this – she's a lot more rootsy than I am. She's country, blues, she plays a lot of slide, and I'm obviously very blues-rock. To me it's like comparing Joe Bonamassa to John Mayer. People are only comparing us because we're both female guitar players.'

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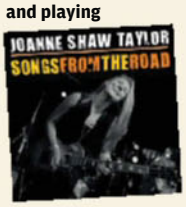
JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR
Diamonds In The Dirt (2010)
JST's second album from 2010 was written in just two days and recorded in less than a fortnight, but still more than holds up.

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR
Songs From The Road (2013)
A live recording/DVD from May last year in London's Borderline sees Taylor confidently showing her stagecraft, vocals and playing



JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR
The Dirty Truth (2014)
The new album shows a new maturity in singing and songwriting to go with her always impressive guitar playing. World domination awaits?

Photo: Mike Prior

Joanne's current Tele echoes the added-PAF layout of her old '66 Fender Esquire

goes into it... but at the end of the day it's all about the live show.'

Britain will be experiencing that show in November, as Joanne is touring with venerable Whitesnake guitarist Bernie Marsden as a special guest. But there are already dates inked in for 2015, while this summer saw the lady and her band play festivals in France and Belgium and make an exploratory seven-date mini-tour of the States. She's swept through Germany, Holland on her current tour, adding still more stamps to her passport and is playing the UK during November.

'Touring is a pretty tough lifestyle, particularly at the base level,' she concedes. 'Fortunately, in quite a few markets now we can make things more comfortable for ourselves: we're not staying two in a room in a dodgy motel in Oklahoma any more – which, trust me, I've done!'

The Axehouse Music label could conceivably give her an opportunity to step back, take a break from the road at some point in the future and encourage new talent – and it's idea that clearly appeals. 'I see a lot of kids coming through and there are certain steps that can't be skipped, but I have a lot more experience now I can share – say do this, don't do this. If you can help people that's always a nice feeling, to give back.'

Having seen Joe Bonamassa playing with Beth Hart, Joanne thinks it would be interesting to find a male vocalist. 'I could just sit back and play guitar... I also wouldn't mind doing a rockabilly kind of thing, an old-school Little Richard-meets-rockabilly kind of album; Imelda May-ish, I suppose. An artist I was dying to work with in that vein was Nick Curran out of Austin, Texas, but sadly we lost him young, the year before last.'

Songwriting also offers some possibilities for collaboration. 'At some point I'd be interested in writing for other artists. There's a lot of songs I write that don't suit my career or my voice, and that would be interesting moving forward.

'There's a few things I'd like to try for fun, a busman's holiday that I couldn't do as Joanne Shaw Taylor because it might be too "out there". I'd like to do an acoustic album of stripped-down, old-school blues one day, but I'm going to have to learn slide guitar first. I'm waiting for that couple of months off...'

'I'd like to do a stripped-down acoustic blues album, but I'm going to have to learn slide'

For now she's more than content with her niche. 'I get to write the songs I want to write, and thanks to the loyal fanbase I can make a living doing what I want to do... so I don't have to get one of those proper jobs people keep telling me about. I left school at 15 with two GCSEs, so my options are limited!'

And another thing...

Joanne would put everything on hold for a summons from Prince. 'I'm still holding out for the gig – I mean, how many female guitar players can he go through?!'

Remembering Johnny Winter

Joanne was fortunate to have toured with the late, great Johnny Winter a few years ago, and was saddened to hear of his passing in July. 'It was one of my earliest tours: I'd just done *White Sugar* and my label had put me on support slots.

'Fortunately I got to play three or four shows with Johnny... maybe more. Obviously when you are a young blues artist, opening up for Johnny is a dream come true. He's the real deal. Growing up listening to predominantly Texas blues, as I did, he was the king of that genre – so, looking back, I was fortunate and blessed to get to meet him briefly and, more than anything, see him play.

'It's terribly sad, but one way of looking at it is that we were lucky to have his talent... there was nobody else like Johnny Winter and there won't be again. He was such an individual player and so important to the genre. It's very sad he's passed away, but I'm grateful we still have the wonderful music – the legacy he blessed us with.'

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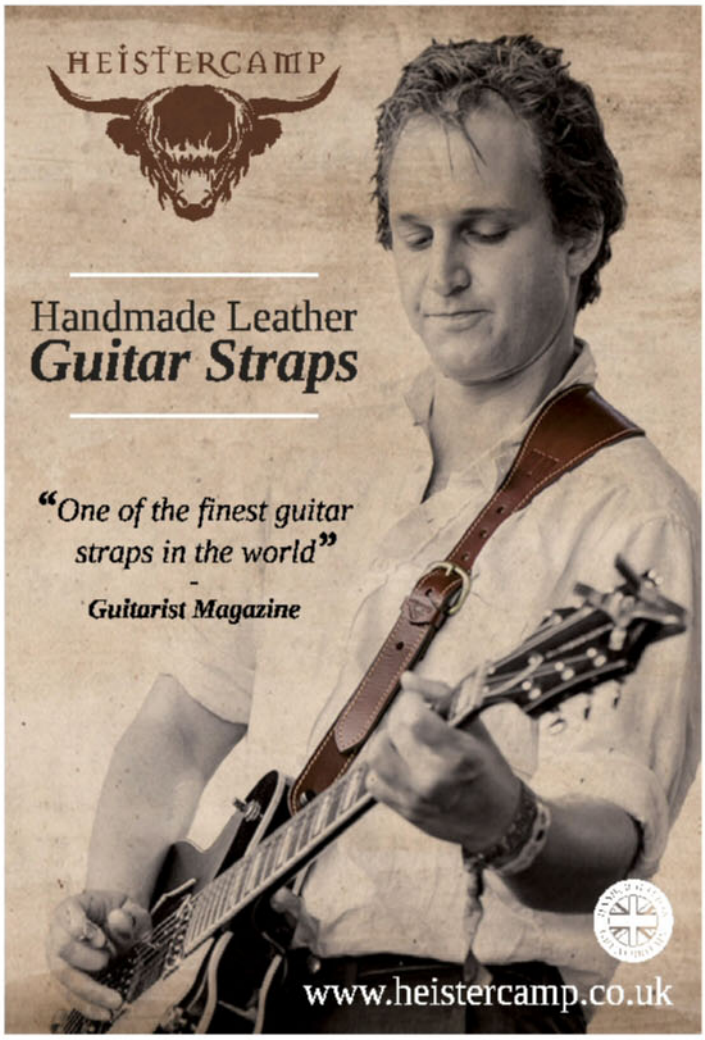
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THE GUITARIST'S LIFE CYCLE PT 2

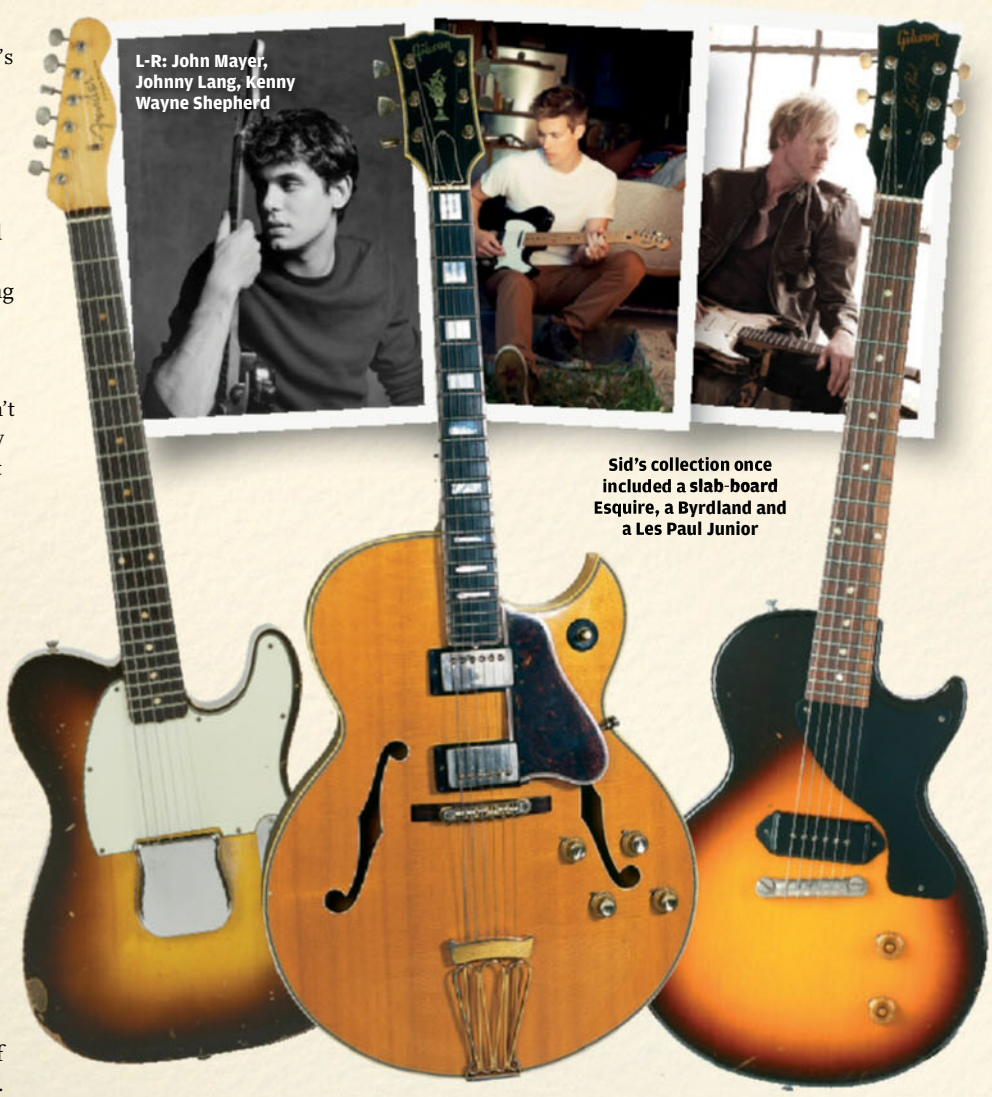
This month **Sid Bishop** muses on how things can improve when guitar players gain a mature view of what they do...

Last month we tracked the guitarist's typical journey from beginner to the late thirties. At 40 and above, our kids are probably now in their teens – and if they're going to develop an interest in music, this is when they'll do it. On one of their excursions into the cupboard under the stairs one of the offspring finds your old guitar, and you have a sinking feeling as you realise that you've just lost it forever. 'Teach me how to play this!' the child demands – but it quickly becomes evident that your renditions of Chuck Berry hits aren't going to work. No stone-age music here: they want the new stuff, most of which is well out of your comfort zone. Still, you reluctantly hand over the guitar, with your best wishes – not forgetting to advise upon the wisdom of getting a proper job, just in case.

By my early forties I could have easily spared a guitar as I had a 335, a Les Paul Junior, a Gibson Byrdland, a '59 Fender Esquire, a handful of other classic Gibson semis, and a custom-made Dick Knight. Eventually, for better or worse, I decided to dispose of the whole collection, and for some unknown reason ceased to play for a number of years, not even having a guitar in the house at all between the mid-'80s and early-'90s. Perhaps it just all got too much.

We're in our fifties now, pining for our glory days; pottering around in the garden is far from being a fulfilling way of spending our spare time, as is hanging around the house all day building a model Spitfire out of earwax, so we decide to get back into playing. We find some phone numbers of our old band buddies and give them a call to see how they're getting along. Assuming nobody's died, guess what: they all think that it would be a really cool idea to dig all the old instruments out of their various attics, or buy new ones, get set up somewhere, and have a run through of some old songs for old times' sake. Why not let off a little steam?

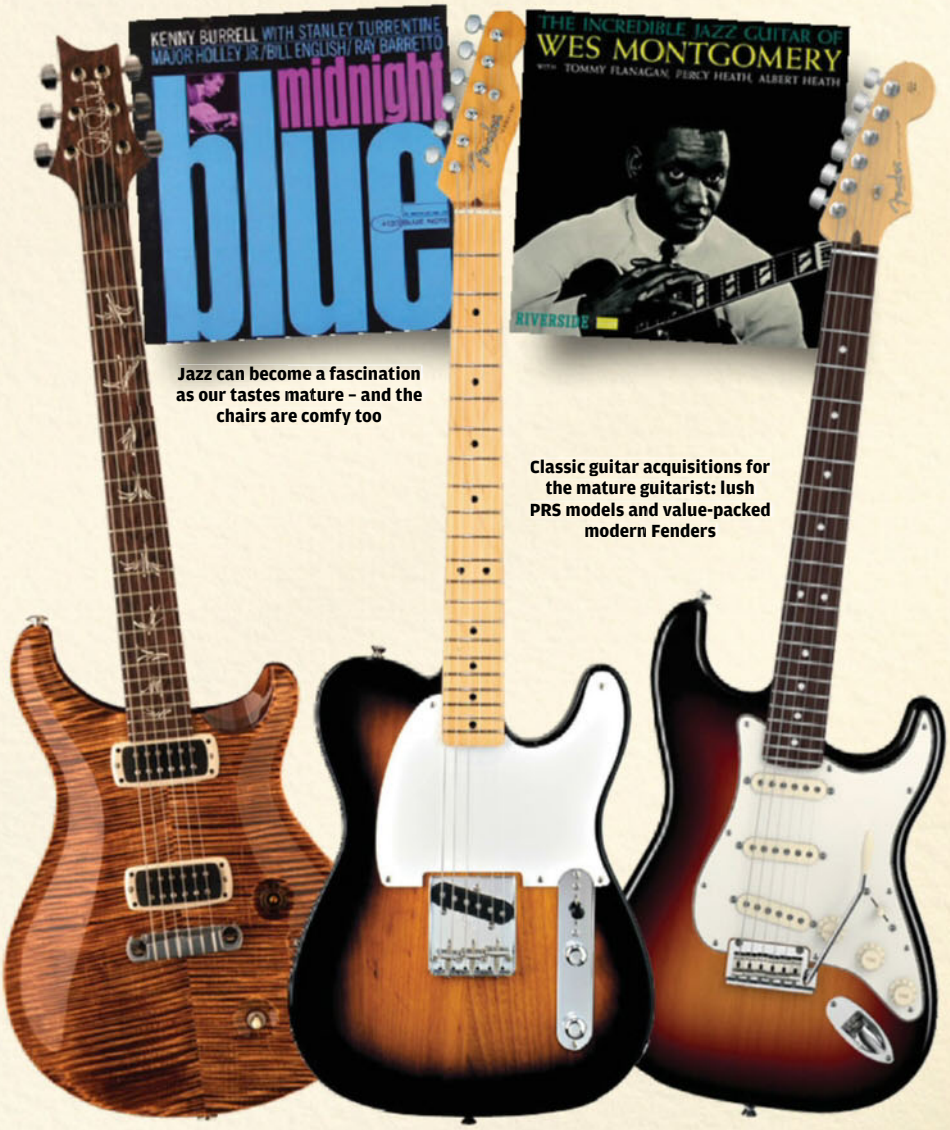
Tastes change, of course... not just ours, but also those of the wider music-buying public, and I've noticed a drastic decline in the number of guitar-based rock and blues bands. The young generation are looking for something different. We did the same ourselves years earlier, but at times I search in vain for new music to listen to, so I habitually return to the old favourites. Fortunately there are some younger players around, guys like Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Jonny Lang and John Mayer, who continue to fly the flag for the music I like, and I continue to buy their records while at the same time adding more fresh licks to my own repertoire.



L-R: John Mayer, Johnny Lang, Kenny Wayne Shepherd

Sid's collection once included a slab-board Esquire, a Byrdland and a Les Paul Junior

We shouldn't be intimidated for one moment. With age and experience on our side we are probably much better than we think we are



Jazz can become a fascination as our tastes mature – and the chairs are comfy too

Classic guitar acquisitions for the mature guitarist: lush PRS models and value-packed modern Fenders

Guitars are not just for teenagers, and whether you're 15 or 75 there's no reason why you should give up – or even be put off starting to learn

In our sixties most of us find we are playing better than ever. Guitar techniques have moved along a bit since the old days, and if we happen to come across a local pub with live music and some flashy young bucks playing blistering runs and a million notes a minute, we shouldn't be intimidated for one moment. With age and experience on our side, we are probably much better than we think we are. Once we get that band off the ground we will find that it's exactly those guys who hover round the front of the stage, watching what we are doing and taking it all in.

If your new band manages to cobble together a couple of hours' worth of mutually satisfactory standards and start traipsing around the pubs and bars with a view to perhaps getting a gig or two, you may be dismayed to discover that many of your target venues have vanished. If they're not empty, boarded up and rotting away, the landlords have decided to entertain their shrinking clienteles with discos, karaoke nights or a local folk singer. There are a variety of reasons for this: restrictive changes to the live music licensing regulations, cheaper beer from supermarkets, the smoking ban... but none of this benefits the live band scene, and in some towns finding anywhere to play can be problematic.

At this stage we're still out there gigging wherever the band can locate suitable venues, and finding that there's a whole new generation of audiences who in fact love all this now 'vintage' stuff, so we go down well most nights. We've got some top quality equipment, collected by a process of elimination over several decades, and we know what we're doing. If that had been the case back in our teens then perhaps we would have been famous like our contemporaries Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Pete Townshend, Eric Clapton and Keef, all of whom are still at it, and have been lucky enough never to have needed proper jobs. We do get a little money for these outings, but money is now no longer a consideration. We do it simply for the sheer love of doing it. We are all pensioners by now, and should be fairly comfortably off if we've managed our affairs wisely.

Harking back to an earlier stage in our lives we once again discover that we have a reasonable amount of disposable income that we need have no qualms about spending. We might even find ourselves in a position where we can splash out on a top-end instrument, like a limited run Gibson Les Paul Standard or a PRS Private Stock, whatever turns us on, but it will be that one special guitar that we've always promised ourselves but have never before quite been able to afford. These days I'm playing a Strat; my long-favoured Gibson semis having got eye-wateringly expensive, whereas Strats just seem to get cheaper. I've also just got hold of a new Fender Esquire, so I can re-live a little part of my past.

Naturally enough the body ages, even if the brain doesn't. Gigging can be wearisome at times, though downsizing amps makes things more manageable. Instead of a Dual Showman or a Marshall stack, I have a 1990 Fender 85 1x12" – it sounds great, and it's plenty loud enough for our gigs these days. Surprisingly publicans don't seem to like having their windows blown out, though nobody seemed to mind in the '60s and '70s!

Although I'm still 25 in my head, my body seems to demand a nap every now and then, and perhaps the time is not very far away when I will have to figure out some way of doing gigs sitting down. Becoming a jazz player would fit the bill – they all seem to sit down rather a lot. I've been buying a lot of Kenny Burrell and Wes Montgomery records and getting more familiar with the genre as the last couple of years have gone by. I'm still some way from thinking of myself as a competent jazz guitarist, but I'm steadily getting there, one principal motivation being the thought of doing gigs seated.

I'm now just two years off 70, still doing a bit of recording and the odd gig, and loving it. Someone wiser than me once said 'A guitar is for life, not just for Christmas', and that's exactly right; once picked up, most of us can never again put it down for long. It doesn't matter how old you are, guitars are not just for teenagers, and whether you're 15 or 75 there is no reason at all why you should give up, or even be put off from starting to learn. It seems to burrow into the system like some kind of benign parasite, and as long as I can manage to stand upright with a guitar hanging round my neck, I intend to continue. I trust you will too.

12-fret PROGRAM

Luke Potashnick and Paul Sayer of hard-working blues-rock combo the Temperance Movement both have great taste in classic guitar sounds. Interview by **Lars Mullen**

'The Temperance Movement is now in its third year,' explains Luke Potashnick, 'and it's going really well for us right now.

I originally got together with Paul, and we gathered all our guitars and amps together in one house and played them all for days to hear how they differed in sound and how they worked with the songs we were writing.

'I'd known vocalist Phil Campbell for a while, so we invited him down to London to sit around the table and throw in some ideas. He'd commute back and forth and the whole thing gelled really quickly, and we could see a lot of potentia. We drafted in ex-Jamiroquai bassist Nick Fyffe, plus Damon Wilson on drums who has worked with Ray Davies and the Waterboys.

'We tried out the material first on a few small gigs and built up quite a following, and then went flat out on the circuit during 2013. We started the year at the Borderline in London and finished the year off at Shepherd's Bush Empire – which was a really big jump for us after playing over 100 venues in between all over the UK and Europe.

'But we were still doing everything ourselves... driving the truck to gigs, setting up all our own gear, sitting in a room packaging up hundreds of copies of our EP to get to the post office on time. When we finally released the album it charted at #12 in the main charts, which took us by surprise, but it must be all down to the loyal following we've built up. It's easier now with a record company and a live agent.'

Not only that, but they've also opened for arguably the biggest band in the world. 'Yeah, that was cool,' grins Luke. 'I had just arrived in Sri Lanka for a two-week break with my wife when I got an email saying we were opening up for the Rolling Stones and that the first show was in four days' time! Luckily I have an understanding wife, and she just said I had to go! Apparently Mick Jagger had liked what he had heard and her asked us to support at four shows – Zurich, Berlin, Vienna and Dusseldorf. It was pretty amazing to play to crowds of 70,000 people, let alone meet our heroes and hang out with them.'

'Keith and Ronnie obviously have techs and no worries about guitars on tour, but they are certainly into their guitars!' adds Paul. 'We did talk to Ronnie for a while about guitars when he was soundchecking with his original Zemaitis guitar he used in the Faces. He said it was still his *Stay With Me* guitar.

'I think Mick may have spotted in the Temperance Movement a kind of echo of the early Stones. By that, I mean we have a big guitar sound that works really well with the rhythm section, and it all gives a platform for Phil's vocals and his character on stage.'

For Paul, rock'n'roll is very much in the family. 'My dad played an early Strat and a

Paul with his family Telecaster, Luke with French-polished 2004 LP Standard

Late '60s blonde Tele, the sunburst '60s Tele from Paul's father, and a Deltone replica

late '60s sunburst Telecaster,' he explains. 'He gave me the Tele when I started out, so I was lucky enough to have a really good guitar from day one. The music he played also influenced me a lot – stuff like Little Feat, Bonnie Raitt, the Stones and Neil Young were all favourites of his.

'In my late teens I went through a period of playing new guitars, but after a couple of years I picked up the old Tele and it all came back to me how much I really loved that guitar. But the sunburst Tele is very sentimental to me, so much so that I wanted to replace it for live work, so I picked up another late '60s cream Tele. Funnily enough the serial number is just 100 digits away. I ended up using it all over the new album.

'There is some great new stuff on the market, but personally I just like the feel of a played-in guitar. I don't mind if it looks like it's been around the block more than once. Someone told me that it was a good sign if a guitar was really well-worn, as it was proof that it had previously been somebody's number one!

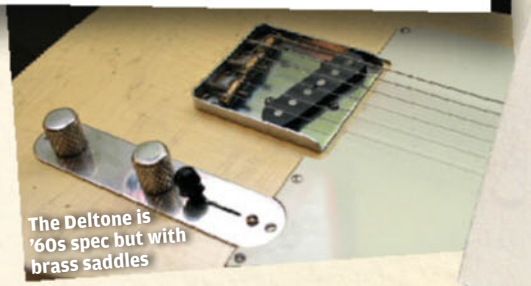
'There's just something about an old guitar... I'm not sure if it's down to the era when it was made, or simply that it's mellowed and all the woods are resonating together. I think Luke feels the same way.'

'Yes, for me it's a bit of a vibe thing, which does sound like a cliché, but there you go,' confirms Luke. 'It's always the old ones that make me go "wow" and makes me want to pick them up and play with all my soul. When you have a few – as we are lucky enough to have here – then each one influences our playing and certainly our writing, especially coming up with new riffs.

'When I was looking for a Tele I went to see several recommendations, but none really did it for me. Then I saw one in Denmark Street, built by Deltone Guitars, who specialise in aged replicas. I've always been sceptical about replicas, but this one is exceptional. They've used great components with nickel hardware which ages better, the swamp ash body has an olympic white finish, and the pickups are handwound to the original specs. It's a real player with a fantastic neck.

'I have several Tele-playing heroes, from Jimmy Page to Clarence White of the Byrds, who invented the B-Bender along with Gene Parsons from Nashville West. I read that before that, when Clarence was soloing in the studio, he would get the bassist to reach over and bend the B string on his guitar between the nut and the tuner to get the same effect!'

'Yeah, it's such a basic guitar, but from the early Yardbirds with Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck to the Rolling Stones to Mike Campbell from the Heartbreakers, so many players have squeezed so many great sounds out of them,'


The Deltone is '60s spec but with brass saddles

Paul chips in. 'With just one tone and one volume control, Teles are so easy to use live. I think because it's such a blank canvas, you can really hear the guitar player.

'For example, we are two guitar players in a band and so we're often very conscious of both using different amps and guitars – but even if we both have the same amps but a Telecaster each on one night, you can hear the different styles. That just happened, actually. I was playing a Telecaster the other night and I looked up and hadn't realised that Paul was ripping through a Tele as well! I think it's that particular guitar that lets you get away with it.'

Ex-Bruce Dickinson ESP/Squier Strat and a refin '63 Strat

Strats have a big place in the Temperance Movement too. 'Bruce Dickinson, the guitarist in Little Angels, came to see me several years ago when I was in Rooster,' Luke recalls. 'He was very complimentary about how I played the Les Paul in the band, and said I should also own a Strat, and so he gave me one.

'It's a hybrid, really, with an ESP body and a Squier JV Telecaster neck, but it still has the original ESP Strat pickups. It's just a really cool-sounding guitar, and it records really well as it has more of a midrange sound rather than being all top and bottom. I'm flattered that he gave it to me, as it was his main guitar for a long time. I can only think the fishbone carvings on the body and inlaid on the neck are because he's a mad keen fisherman. ↔

Dwight Coronet and a '69 Gibson SG Special

Gibson Dickey Betts SG and a '65 SG Standard

1968 Les Paul Custom and a Les Paul Standard R8

If I'm not using a Tele or an SG, this is my main guitar if I want a Hendrix/Gilmour thing or even a Randy California sound.'

Next to the fishbone ESP/Squier is a pre-CBS Fender Strat. 'I bought the '63 Strat from a guy in France about five years ago,' says Paul. 'It was in a real mess. It had been stripped totally bare; luckily he had all the parts, so it was just a case of reassembling it from scratch. I could see it had been played within an inch of its life, so again, to me this was a sign that it had been a special guitar.

'I took it to Clive Brown to be refinished in a distressed shoreline gold. He's so good with the aging process – for me, at least, a new finish on an old guitar wouldn't have looked right. I got it back just in time to record our last album and used it for a warmer sound on a few tracks including *Pride*, *Morning Riders* and *Serenity*. The middle pickup has a really good rhythm sound which I use a lot.

'Neither of us are into using tons of pedals. We do have a lot between us, but the real Temperance Movement guitar sound is a loud amp with just maybe an overdrive in front for a solo boost.'

The cool little single-pickup double-cut pictured above, leaning against a to-die-for Park rig, might look like an Epiphone Coronet, but the 'D' on the scratchplate tells a different story.

'This is a little unusual,' says Luke. 'It is a Coronet, of course, which was the Epiphone version of the Les Paul Junior with a single P90, but it's a Dwight – a house brand name that Epiphone used for Sonny Shields Music in Illinois in the early '60s. They had "Dwight" on the headstock and a "D" on the scratchplate instead of the "E" for Epiphone.

'I know Steve Marriott used to play one, which is great as I'm a big Small Faces and Humble Pie fan. The neck is great... it feels very similar to the profile on a '59 Les Paul. The really odd thing about it is the white dogears on the black plastic pickup cover. I believe this one used to belong to Mick Ralphs.'

'I've always liked the clarity of P90 pickups. The SG Special to me is a bit like Gibson's Telecaster – it's a basic model that has a lot of soul'

Luke's flagship guitar is his favourite '69 Gibson SG Special. 'The neck on this SG is a real handful, which I like. It's also a "type 2" SG with the stronger neck joint, which is a big deal for me as I like to move the neck a lot to get vibrato on open chords.

'Like Paul said earlier, this SG is a classic example of all the woods resonating together. If I had to vacate the premises pretty quick for some reason, this would be the guitar I'd grab. A lot of people know I like a cool SG, and Al from Chandlers' Guitars called me saying he had one in the shop. I've always liked the response and the clarity of a P90... humbuckers can be a little thick-sounding. The SG Special to me is like Gibson's Telecaster, a basic model that has a lot of soul, and they clean up and thin out really well when you lower the volume control.'

Next in line is Paul's SG, this time a modern version, and a good one – a Dickey Betts signature model SG Standard. 'It has a one-piece mahogany body, hand-carved and aged to look the part, and a pair of humbuckers wound to the original PAF specs with aged nickel covers,' says Paul. 'I agree with Luke – a Les Paul can be a little too much in every department, but an SG seems to have a more balanced sound.'

From modern we go back to vintage with Luke's SG Standard, this time with a Vibrola tailpiece. 'My main guitar when I started this band was a '67 SG, which got stolen,' he explains. 'I spent ages trying to find a replacement, and various people would call me up saying I should try this or that, but none at the time felt right for me. I went through a few, and gave one that didn't work out to Katie Melua when I was working with her; it worked for her and it's one of her main guitars right now, which proves it's all down to personal choice.

'The only one that clicked for me was this '65 SG Standard. It's early '65, so the neck has more of a '64 profile and it's slightly wider at the nut, which is ideal for me. The neck humbucker is an original PAF which is big, loud and clear, while the back unit is a slightly later T-top, which has a really savage sound. It's a good combination, actually, and I can get some really good sounds out of this guitar. Some of the sounds that influenced me the most were people like Peter Green and the Bluesbreakers... those guys used Les Pauls, but because of the recording technology back then the low end wasn't as apparent as it is today with modern gear. That means I can get over that with the SG as it has the Les Paul midrange but with less bottom end, so I can get the same sound as those old recordings.' ➧➧

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Paul with 1968 Gibson ES-335

Luke and oddball '68 Guild Thunderbird

'The Guild Thunderbird has a Fender Jaguar vibe about it. It has some nice honky sounds, but I never seem to get the same sound twice'

'Still, a real Les Paul is a must-have guitar if you have guitar collection,' says Paul. 'I've had this tobacco sunburst R8 about seven years now – it's an aged replica of a '58. I'd previously only really owned the sunburst Tele, but wanted a humbucker-loaded guitar as I liked so many Les Paul players, including Paul Kossoff. I was on tour in the USA and had a day off in New York and tried out Les Pauls in every guitar shop I could find. I finally settled on this one in 30th Street Guitars. If I've been playing it for a while live then I find it hard to swap back to other guitars, as it has such a big neck.

'I've had a pair of Monty's PAF humbuckers installed by Matt Gleeson, who owns Monty's Guitars in London. They're amazing, and they clean up nicely without getting too thin. Before this guitar, I found that Les Pauls had too much low end for this band. I'm normally over the side of the stage with the bass player so I don't want a swirly, bassy low end –I need to cut through the mix without being that loud. We're a fairly loud band, though, and it's a challenge.

'We have just one guitar tech on the road who works really hard, but Monty's Guitars looks after all our guitars when we're not touring. One of the videos that got the band started was us doing *Only A Friend* in a studio, and I was using this Les Paul. It became a flagship video for us and if I don't use it live now then I get guys coming up at gigs asking where the Les Paul is!'

'I believe Les Pauls went slightly out of fashion in the mid '60s until some of the more famous players started using them again,' says Luke. 'Players like Eric Clapton, Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper certainly helped to popularise Les Pauls once more. They had enough output to smash the front end of an amp and get that signing overdriven sound that's become so famous, so Gibson started to produce them in large quantities again, and for a time they were using PAF humbuckers from leftover stock.

'That's what I've got with the black '68 Custom. It's a great-looking guitar but it was the sound that won me over – it's very much in the same ballpark as Mick Taylor when he was with John Mayall. I took this guitar to Matt Gleeson, who got quite excited about the tone and the output of these pickups, and he made Paul and myself a set based on the specs of these. The neck has been shaved down a little, and that's the only reason I could afford it – someone was following the idea that Jimmy Page had. I don't use it live as I find it hard to make it sit in the mix, but it's great for writing and recording.

'My 2004 Les Paul Standard' – pictured on page 83 – 'is a little special to me, as it was the first new guitar I bought with money I earned as a professional musician. At this period in time Gibson were producing them with a '50s neck profile which I liked, and they were also quite lightweight, even though they weren't chambered.

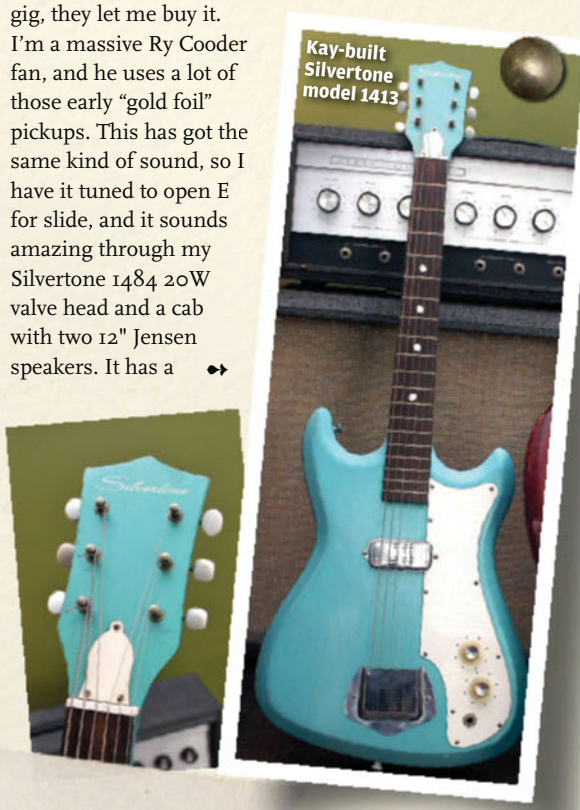
'I must admit that this one does go against all I've said about new versus old guitars. I played it for a while, then stuck it under the bed as I started to lean towards older guitars, but came back to it by chance when it was the only Les Paul I had on hand for a gig.

'I realised how well it played, but I really didn't like the heavy finish which I'm convinced was spoiling the sound, so I took it to my uncle who is an antiques restorer and he used chemicals to completely strip it right back and gave it a French polish finish.

'I did some research and found that sonically this was the best finish a guitar can have, but it's very costly and labour-intensive. He applied about 30 incredibly fine coats and did hours of hand-sanding and finishing. It's noticeably lighter and the tone has been vastly improved. I think it looks great, and the neck is super-smooth.'

Luke also has a thing for the odd quirky guitar. 'If we get time on tour we'll check out the local guitar shops wherever we are, looking for something unusual,' he says. 'When we were in Stockholm we paid a visit to Hellstone Musik and ended up playing outside in the street with guitars we chose from the shop! There's a YouTube video out there with me playing this Silvertone 1413 guitar with a metallic turquoise finish, dating from the mid '60s.

'I just loved it, and when we finished the gig, they let me buy it. I'm a massive Ry Cooder fan, and he uses a lot of those early "gold foil" pickups. This has got the same kind of sound, so I have it tuned to open E for slide, and it sounds amazing through my Silvertone 1484 20W valve head and a cab with two 12" Jensen speakers. It has a ↔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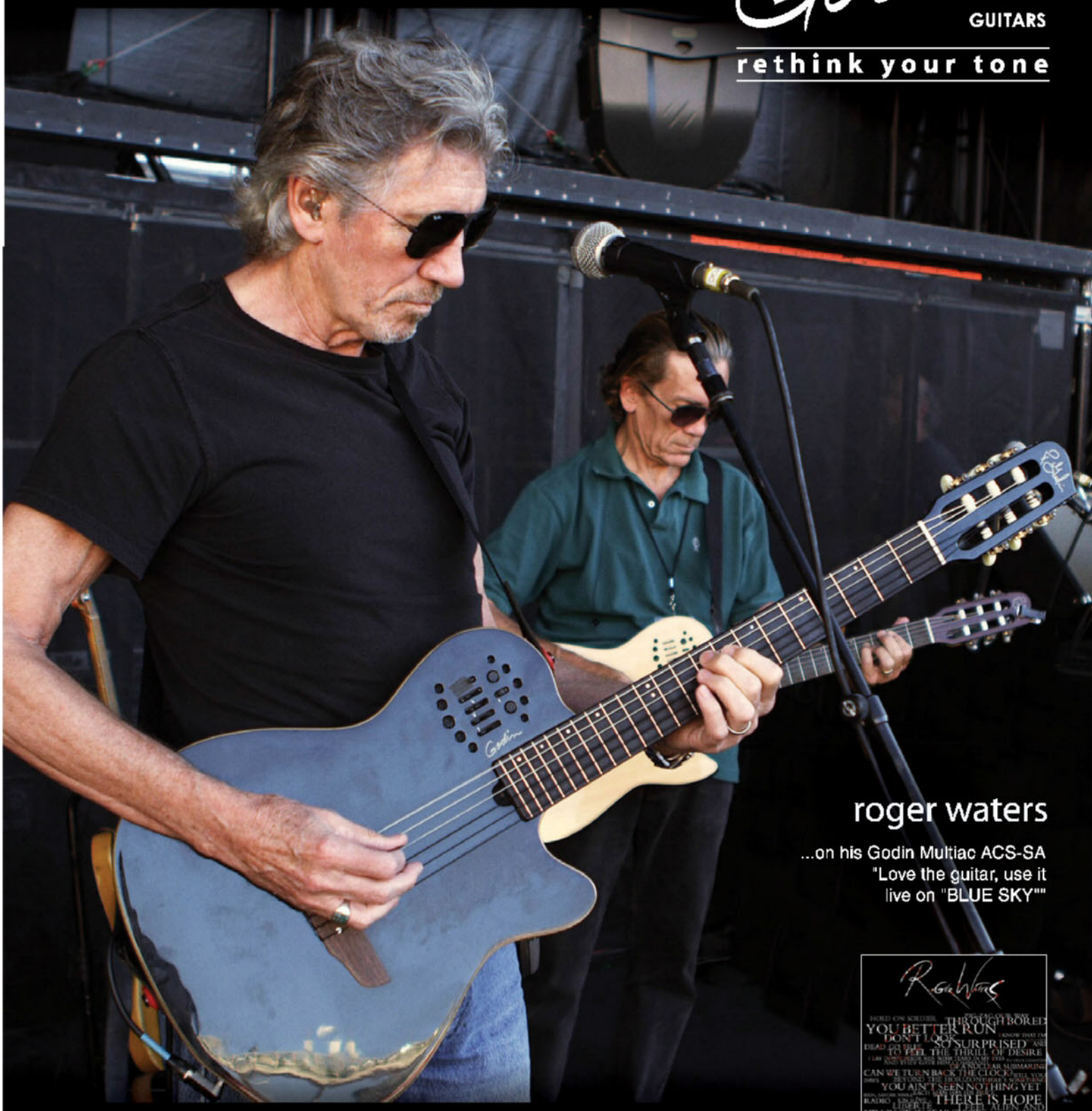

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Paul with 1970s Sho-Bud LDG and Swart amplifier

Hofner Verithin, circa 1963

'I was surprised by how the Hofner played, but I'd struggle to use it live because of the feedback I'd get at the volume we use in this band'

really unique built-in tremolo, and the head is wired to the cab, where it neatly tucks away for transportation.

'My '1965 Guild Thunderbird is also a rare oddity – it's the same model that Muddy Waters once played. It's really interesting, as it's like nothing else in my collection... it has a Fender Jaguar vibe about it. With all the switches there are some really nice honky sounds happening, but I never seem to get the same sound twice – and both pickups have mute switches set dangerously close to the sweep of my strumming hand!'

Guitar-spotters in the Temperance Movement's audience have a ball at their gigs. 'Yeah, we certainly swap them around a lot,' grins Paul. 'I have a Gibson 335 which works well for me live, I guess just like the SG works for Luke. Loads of 335 players have influenced me, from Clapton back to Freddie King. I'd been online and seen a cherry '68 model for sale in Scotland, not too far from Glasgow. As luck would have it we were gigging about an hour away and had a day off the next day, so I took the band's truck for a ride to meet this guy, who was in his seventies. He'd owned it from new, and just played it in a club band. I sat in his house, played it and fell in love straight away. I used it most nights for the rest of that tour.

'Like my old sunburst Tele it has a narrow neck, so I don't have a problem swapping back and forth during a gig. I've fitted a pair of Matt Gleeson's humbuckers, the ones which were wound to the spec of Luke's Les Paul Custom.'

'This Hofner Verithin is the only large semi-acoustic I have right now,' explains Luke. 'I saw it in No.Tom Guitars in London. I wasn't out to buy one at all, but it looked cool so I tried it out and was really taken aback by how it played and how well the Bigsby worked. It's not a substitute for a 335 as it doesn't have a centre block, and I'd struggle to use it live because of the feedback I'd get at the volume we use in this band. Saying that, I've used it on a track on the forthcoming album called *Three Bullets In The Morning Sun*, where I needed some guitar feedback at a low volume.'

As we chat to Luke about guitars and amps, the sweet, dulcet tones of a pedal steel guitar waft from the next room. 'I've always liked the sound of a really nice pedal steel,' says Paul. 'I had a few lessons on a steel I bought in LA, but it wasn't that good, but then Gerry Hogan from Albert Lee's band Hogan's Heroes said he knew a guy who was selling this 1970s Lloyd Green signature Sho-Bud, finished in green flamed maple. It's a bit heavy to lug around, but it comes out on tour and I use it every night. I used it on *Lovers And Fighters* and also on the next album, which is currently in the making.'

'We are always busy writing – and we don't just do it in the studio, we're always working away individually at home on acoustics,' says Luke. 'There's always a bunch of them lying around the place.

'My main acoustic for writing and recording is this Epiphone Texan from the '60s. This one has a really big, balanced sound and the most beautiful tone. We never have any problems recording with it in the studio – it just sits happily in the mix every time. It's a really inspirational songwriting guitar.'

Paul's main acoustic is also from the 1960s, but it's a Martin D-18. 'I picked it up in George Gruhn's shop in Nashville,' he says. 'I spent the best part of a day trying them all out and then playing every single one again to double-check, but this one just stood out. It had a neck reset done by the guy who does the repairs in the same shop, so I knew it had been worked on by a professional.

'Like Luke's Epiphone, this is my go-to acoustic every time. I've used it on every acoustic session ever since I got it, including *Chinese Lanterns* on our last album. It's getting quite valuable now, so I have a new D-18 which I'm taking on the road.

'I also have a big-bodied Lowden which I originally borrowed from a friend for some recording work, and I just refused to give it back. I had to force him to tell me what he wanted for it! This is the ultimate soloist's acoustic guitar – it fills all the holes in the sonic spectrum.'

As 2015 beckons the Temperance Movement are working hard in the studio and looking forward to touring the USA. 'It looks like we are going to be spending a fair amount of time over there next year, which is quite exciting,' Paul says. 'Mind you, we won't be taking that many guitars with us. We're both in exactly the same frame of mind – we need to leave room for all the extra ones which will be coming home with us!'

Martin D-18 and Epiphone Texan, both from the 1960s

For more information on the Temperance Movement head on over to http:/ thetemperancemovement.com

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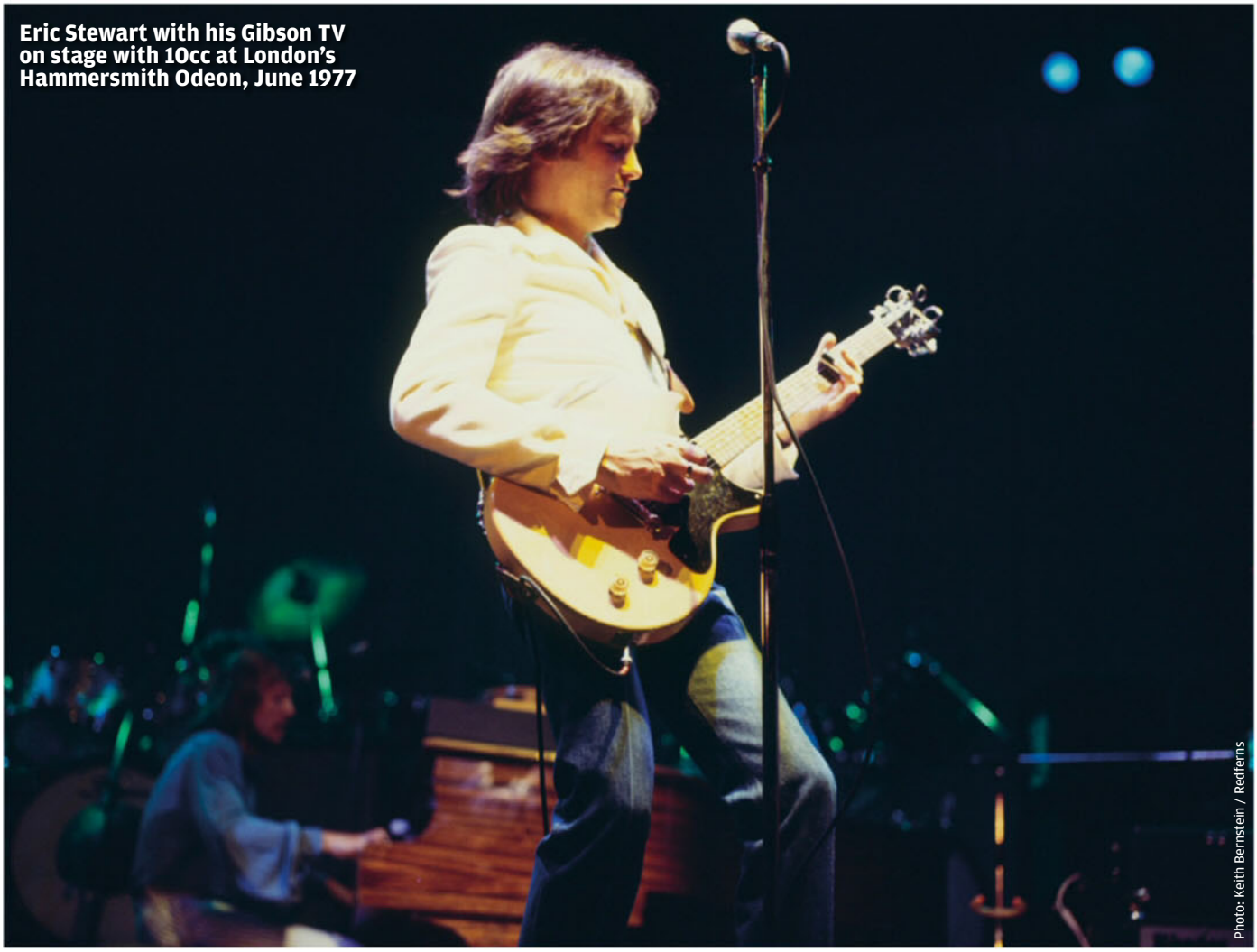
Art for Art's sake

This month we're taking a privileged look at a classic 1959 double-cutaway Gibson TV Model that was owned by not one, but two famous players – Eric Stewart of 10cc and Mick Ralphs of Bad Company. **Steve Clarke** has the inside details...



Eric Stewart with his Gibson TV on stage with 10cc at London's Hammersmith Odeon, June 1977

Photo: Keith Bernstein / Redferns

I'm looking forward to today's workshop review as I pack my tools and get on the motorway. I have received a call from Mr Richard Henry (richardhenryguitars.com): now Richard is the guy who was responsible for the recent sale of the Greeny Les Paul to Kirk Hammett from Metallica (and he also kindly supplied *G&B* with an exclusive photo of Kirk with his purchase, which we used on page 11 of our September magazine, issue 25 no 12). Richard has brokered the sale of a number of prestigious guitars over the years and so I was delighted when he invited me to take a look at the Les Paul TV previously owned by Eric Stewart of 10CC and Mick Ralphs of Bad Company.

The Gibson Les Paul Junior was introduced in 1954, with a characteristic dark brown-over-yellow lacquer giving some intense shading on this entry/student model guitar. Les Paul and Mary Ford, of course, were extremely popular stars of the day; they had their own TV show between 1954 and 1958 and even featured in TV commercials said to be shown up to five times a day, which in those days was massive exposure.

The TV Model was a sales idea to launch the guitar. It had a special light-coloured finish, a very modern-looking yellow known by Gibson as 'limed mahogany'; it's said that the idea was to make the guitar show up more effectively on the black and white television sets of the day.

In late 1958 the Junior was redesigned with a double cutaway body, and around this time the standard sunburst finish was replaced by the dark cherry red that would become a staple in the '60s with the SG and many other models, but the TV finish option remained.

Soon afterwards a two pickup Special model appeared, and the TV now had a brighter yellow version of the earlier limed mahogany finish. However, due to the colour variants of the base mahogany and also depending upon whether the guitar has been exposed to ultra-violet light, examples today can vary in colour from a creamy beige to a pale milky yellow.

First impressions

The Stewart/Ralphs TV sits in a Challenge #115 alligator soft shell brown case. It's a sight to behold with its intense yellow finish, but as you would expect of a guitar that's been around since 1959, it's not too shiny. Finish checking is evident, and the fine cracks in the lacquer completely cover the guitar. The weight of the guitar is 7.3lbs. Inside the case is a fine selection of additional parts including Grover USA machineheads, Kluson Deluxe machineheads, a Badass bridge and interestingly, a Badass bridge with brass saddles numbered 1-6 underneath, and finally two gold barrel speed knobs.

Construction

The TV has a Honduras mahogany body and neck with an unusually dark Brazilian rosewood fingerboard in surprisingly good condition. There isn't much wear on the first three frets and the dot inlays really set off the look of this guitar beautifully. As standard, there is no binding on the neck; I also don't think crown inlays would look right on a guitar like this, as it's quite stripped-back in the hardware department. The simplicity may have been a cost factor, but it makes for a clean and purposeful guitar.

Headstock

Like many old Gibsons, this TV has a crack at the back of the peghead but it's not serious: the yellow lacquer on the neck has worn through to expose the wood underneath but it is nice and smooth. The front headstock has very thinly-applied black lacquer with plenty of dings and scratches but no checking cracks. The gold script Gibson logo is in good condition; again to keep costs down there was no pearl logo that you'd expect to see on the higher-end Gibsons.

Machineheads

Suitable three-on-a-plate type Klusons have been put back on and the replacement Grovers are back in the case. The Klusons work fine but will wear and become loose over time, so changing these for peace of mind would be a good move: the plastic buttons are easily damaged.

Removing the guard reveals the length of the neck tenon

Case pocket candy: Badass bridge, Grovers and gold barrel knobs

A '9' series 1959 serial number, Kluson tuners and evidence of a headstock crack

Nut

The nut is 43mm and made of bone and has been cut perfectly. The E, A and D strings are not too deep in their slots; cutting them too deep would risk sticking and creating tuning problems, and could sap string energy from being transferred to the headstock.

Frets

The frets are replacements of a medium oval wire and the fret ends are nicely finished with no sharp edges all the way up to fret 22. There are no dead spots to be found anywhere.

Neck

The neck has a good round feel – not too big. I once had a '59 Special that had a huge neck by comparison. When you take the pickguard off you can see just how far the neck actually goes into the body, giving great stability and transfer of sound. When Gibson added another pickup to the Les Paul Special the joint was not so good, and compromised the sound somewhat. It is clear that '59 necks on these guitars are not all the same. I've recently repaired a neck-break on a Les Paul BFG, and that was bigger at the back than the neck on this TV. I prefer the Les Paul TV neck for comfort: it's one of those guitars you don't want to put down.

Pickup

We are told by Richard that the pickup and cover are non-original and that the current ones were taken from a Les Paul Special at some unknown point in the past. Les Paul Special P90 pickups tend to be fairly consistent at around 8 ohms. The control cavity reveals where there was a cut in the wire to join the pickup, but the way these

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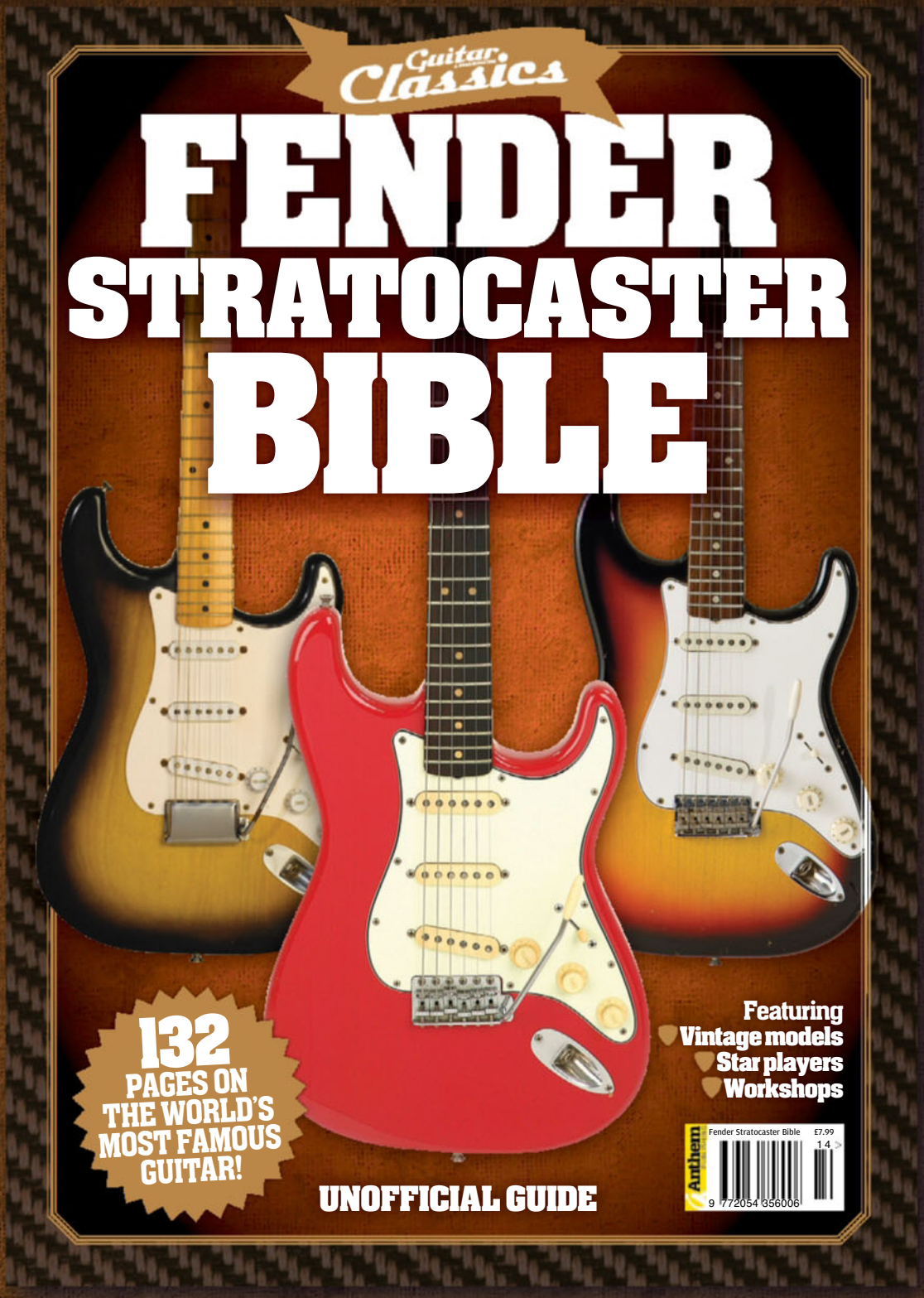

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Wrapover bridge and a P90 taken from an LP Special

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pickups are mounted is also a significant factor in giving this guitar its distinct voicing and individual growl. The fact that the pickup is screwed directly to the wood will affect the sound, and some feel the large pickup cover may pick up subtle vibrations from the wood and transfer it back through the pickup – unlike a humbucker, which is basically floating in a chamber supported by a surround, thus missing that contact.

Bridge

The bridge is a nickel-plated wraparound with small adjustable screws for intonation and anchored down by two stud screws. The fact that the strings are pulled over it helps a lot with the voicing and the tone generated by this very simple design. Some players prefer to do a similar thing on Les Pauls with Tun-O-Matic bridges by pulling the strings over the stud tailpiece first. Gibson did this on many of their guitars, but it wasn't consistent. There is an intonation compromise with this type of bridge, but it's slight, and if – as in this case – the nut has been well-cut, then the trade-off is worth it.

Control cavity

Inside is a single Sprague 'bumblebee' cap with a single 500k volume and single tone pot, and the pots work perfectly. The tone control has a really nice smooth taper to give just a little more tonal interest. I remember some early '70s Les Paul Custom tone pots could be the 'all or nothing' types and I used to leave mine full on, but on this TV model I would definitely use it more often.

Sound and playability

Plugging into a Cornell Plexi 18/20 combo, the first thing that hits you is how 'loud' it is, even at low volume. When you play softly all the dynamics are there, but hit it a bit harder and it really seems to reflect your personal style. There is a 'honk' with P90s that you don't get with humbuckers, and the midrange is evident without being muddy or lacking in clarity. The treble isn't high when compared to a humbucker, but the fullness of tone generated is what grabs you. The guitar is very comfortable to play and well balanced with easy access to the higher end of the fingerboard, and the excellent re-fret with the low crown frets make it a joy to play.

Summary

Looking at the different bridges, pickup changes and machineheads used for each players' needs, this guitar has been a workhorse used to great effect. Eric Stewart has been a long underrated guitarist with an incredible vibrato: just listen to those early 10CC tracks and hear the fantastic riffs he played alongside Lol Creme. On the other hand, it's no surprise that a player like Mick Ralphs with his liking for Les Pauls also loved this P90-loaded guitar. When cranked up, it gives a lovely expressive buzzsaw sound and chords that are rich and long-lasting. The simplicity of construction in no way makes this a lesser guitar tonally and in my view it has plenty to offer any guitarist with a creative, expressive style. Thanks again to Richard Henry for providing access to this guitar and for additional background information.

Steve Clarke of Famous Frets is an experienced guitar tech and repairer and can be contacted via email at stacmusic@yahoo.co.uk.

The Stewart/Ralphs TV in its original alligator case

There is a 'honk' with P90 pickups that you don't get with humbuckers, and the midrange is evident without being muddy or lacking in clarity

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DRILLS FOR THRILLS

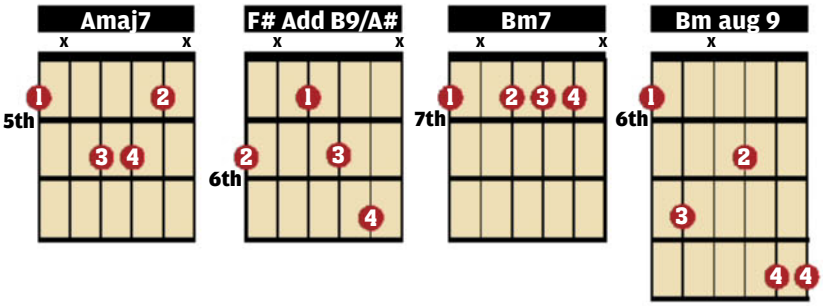
One Step Beyond

This month we're looking at some cool chord extensions and chord substitutes...

Following on from last month's finger twisting jazz progression, here's another chord progression to give your fretting hand a bit of a work-out. This month's progression is based on the standard jazz progression of I, VIm, IIm, V – A, F#m, Bm, E in the key of A major – but uses extended chords and substitutions to make the progression more interesting. Extended chords are ones in which the harmony is extended beyond root/third/fifth, such as Amaj7 and Bm7, which include the natural seventh and flattened seventh degrees of the scales respectively. Instead of chord VIm or F#m we're going to substitute VImaj in a first inversion form and flatten the ninth to form F# add b9/A#. Instead of chord V or E, we're going to use a flattened fifth substitute; the flattened fifth of the E major scale is Bb, so we can substitute E with a Bb chord, in this case Bb aug 9.

1 A MAJ 7, F# ADD B9/A#, BM7, Bb AUG 9

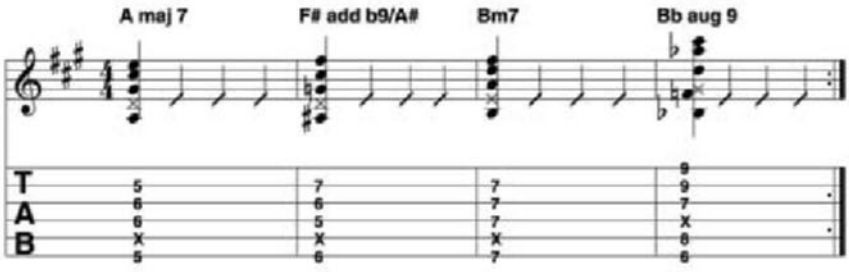
The formula for A maj 7 is root, major third, fifth and major seventh – which gives A, C#, E and G#, although the notes do not appear in this strict order. The formula for F# add b9/A# is root, major third, fifth and flattened ninth – F#, A#, C# and G natural. Notice here that the major third, A#, is at the bottom of this chord, as indicated in the F# add b9/A# name, making this a first inversion. The formula for Bm7 is root, minor third, fifth and flattened seventh – B, D, F# and A. The formula for Bb aug 9 is root, major third, fifth, flattened seventh and augmented ninth... and that means Bb, D, F, Ab and C#.



2 COMMON NOTES AND GUIDE FINGERING 4/4 TIME

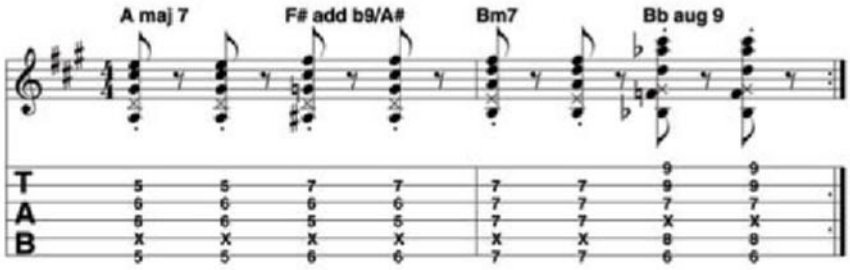
Using the voicings from Ex 1, strum each chord four times using downstrokes, then change to the next chord. Make sure each chord change is in time with your strumming – the speed at which you can make whichever change you find the trickiest determines the tempo at which you will be able play it.

Unlike last month's progression in which there were no common notes played with the same finger from one chord to the next, nor any 'guide fingers', there are a couple of tricks to assist the chord changing in this month's progression. The voicings of F# add b9/A# and Bm7 both use the fourth finger on the second string, seventh fret, so don't lift the fourth finger when making this change. When changing from Bm7 to Bb aug 9 use the first finger as a guide; release the first finger pressing down the bottom string at the seventh fret in the Bm7 chord but without lifting the finger from the string, then slide the finger down a fret to the sixth fret ready to play the lowest note in the Bb aug 9 voicing.



3 SPEEDING UP AND STACCATO 4/4 TIME

This is the same progression as in Exercise 2, but each chord lasts for just two beats and the whole progression is played staccato, as indicated by the dots below or above the note heads. In order to get the staccato effect release the fretting hand pressure, but keep the fingers in contact with the strings. Practice slowly then gradually build up speed.



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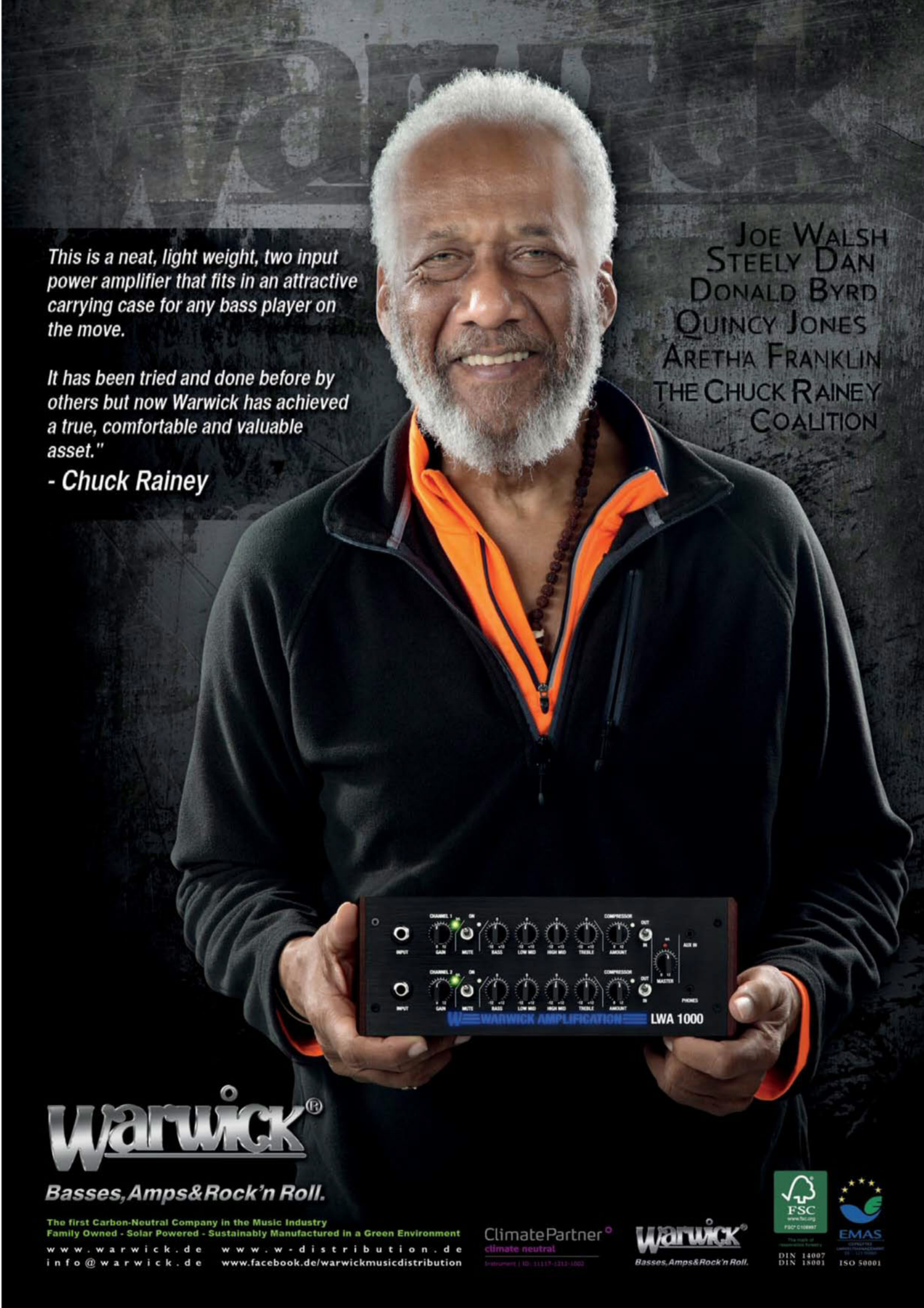
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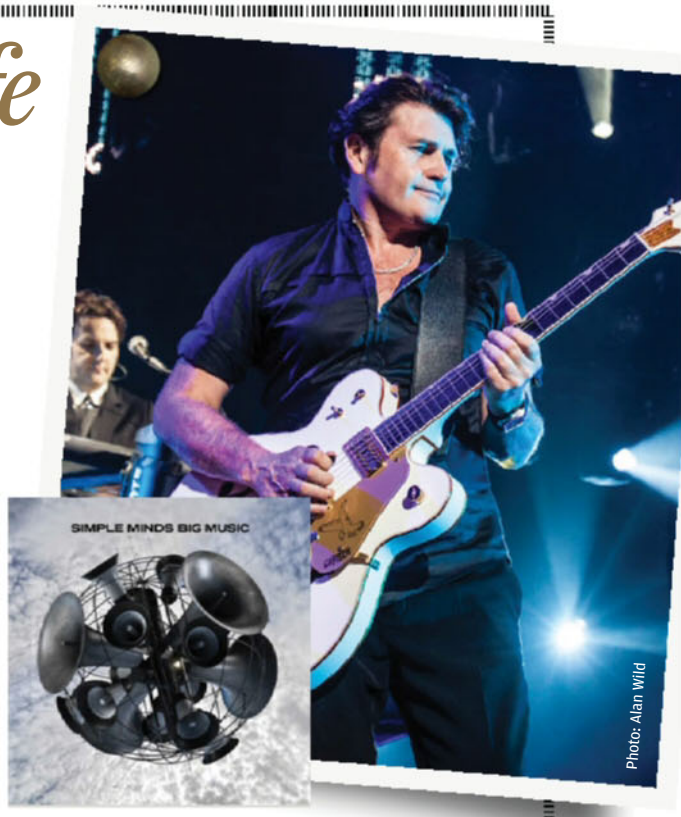
Charlie Burchill

The man with the echoey Gretsch is big on the Velvets, but he has a few surprises in store for us...



Simple Minds guitarist Charlie Burchill has been the only constant alongside vocalist Jim Kerr since the band's inception in 1977. Early experimental albums saw Burchill play violin, keys and sax, but by 1981's breakthrough single *Love Song* Burchill had found himself a classy white Gibson 335. Soon afterwards, he graduated to his trademark 1962 Gretsch White Falcon. Even now on the latest album, *Big Music*, the Falcon is to the fore, as is his trademark echo-soaked sound. 'I love effects,' Burchill confirms. 'I'm old school. I love Space Echoes, the Roland CE-1 chorus and the Echoplex. We worked with a producer once who said "Charlie, you use so much echo that when album is released people will hear it three weeks later!"' *Big Music* has been heralded as their best work in 30 years and Burchill shows, once again, the skills that put him on the vanguard of a group of pioneering players who created a new guitar sound in the 1980s.

David Bowie

THE MAN WHO SOLD THE WORLD

I learned every single note on every track on this record. Mick Ronson is my favourite guitar player. He could do that full-out solo thing but he was also an arranger with a knack of being able to make single notes sound like something orchestrated. There's an incredible energy to Bowie's 12-string acoustic playing, too.

The Doors

LA WOMAN

This was probably the first album I ever heard, because my older brother was a huge Doors fan. I love Robbie Krieger, he played a hybrid kind of blues but with total originality. The melodies are amazing and his sound was so crisp, raucous and hard-edged, yet still clean. Another one I learned every note of.

Patti Smith

HORSES

When we first started our band we were big Velvet Underground fans, and when *Horses* came along later on it seemed like the Velvets reformed, but with a girl singing. I love how completely bare and stripped-down it is. This album was rock and roll in a brand new body with real attitude and atmosphere.

The Velvet Underground

1969: THE VELVET UNDERGROUND LIVE

I love the whole record but one track had a huge impact on me – *What Goes On*. The rhythm playing is dynamite, just the coolest thing. It starts with Lou Reed playing on his own, everybody joins in and it just speeds up. It's not the proficiency, it's a certain attitude, and it's so difficult to play like that.

Lou Reed

NEW YORK

Following on from the Velvets this album is, top to bottom, a proper guitar record. I met him a few times and he was a complete gearhead – all he wanted to talk about was guitars and amps. Listen to this and you'll realise what an amazing guitar player he was. The lyrics, of course, are incredible as well. A real hero.

Bob Dylan

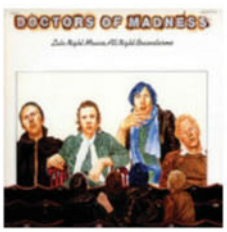
BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

This album actually woke me up and made me develop as a guitar player because I was never a picker. These folk people really know how to get the most from the right hand – it's second nature to them. I think Dylan is an amazing guitarist, and some of the others, too... Paul Simon is an astonishing player.

Doctors Of Madness

LATE NIGHT MOVIES, ALL NIGHT BRAINSTORMS

A weird setup, a four-piece with bass, drums, violin, guitar and vocal. The whole thing is so completely dynamic and in your face – it just goes from zero to a hundred in eight bars. It's like the Ramones before the Ramones but with this electric violin that's like the best guitar you've ever heard in your life!



John Cale

SLOW DAZZLE

This is essentially a three-piece band playing live in the studio. Chris Spedding was the guitarist and I love his playing – my first guitar was a Flying V because he played one. It's another stripped-down record with the guitar at the centre, there's not a spare note. A masterclass in how to be understated but still carry the whole thing.

Joni Mitchell

FOR THE ROSES

It was effortless when she played. You'd think, where's that huge weird sound coming from? With her tunings the strings can be detuned up to four steps – it was kind of unfathomable. I tried to play the title track; I got the tuning totally wrong, but I ended up using it constantly. So it helped me find my own thing.

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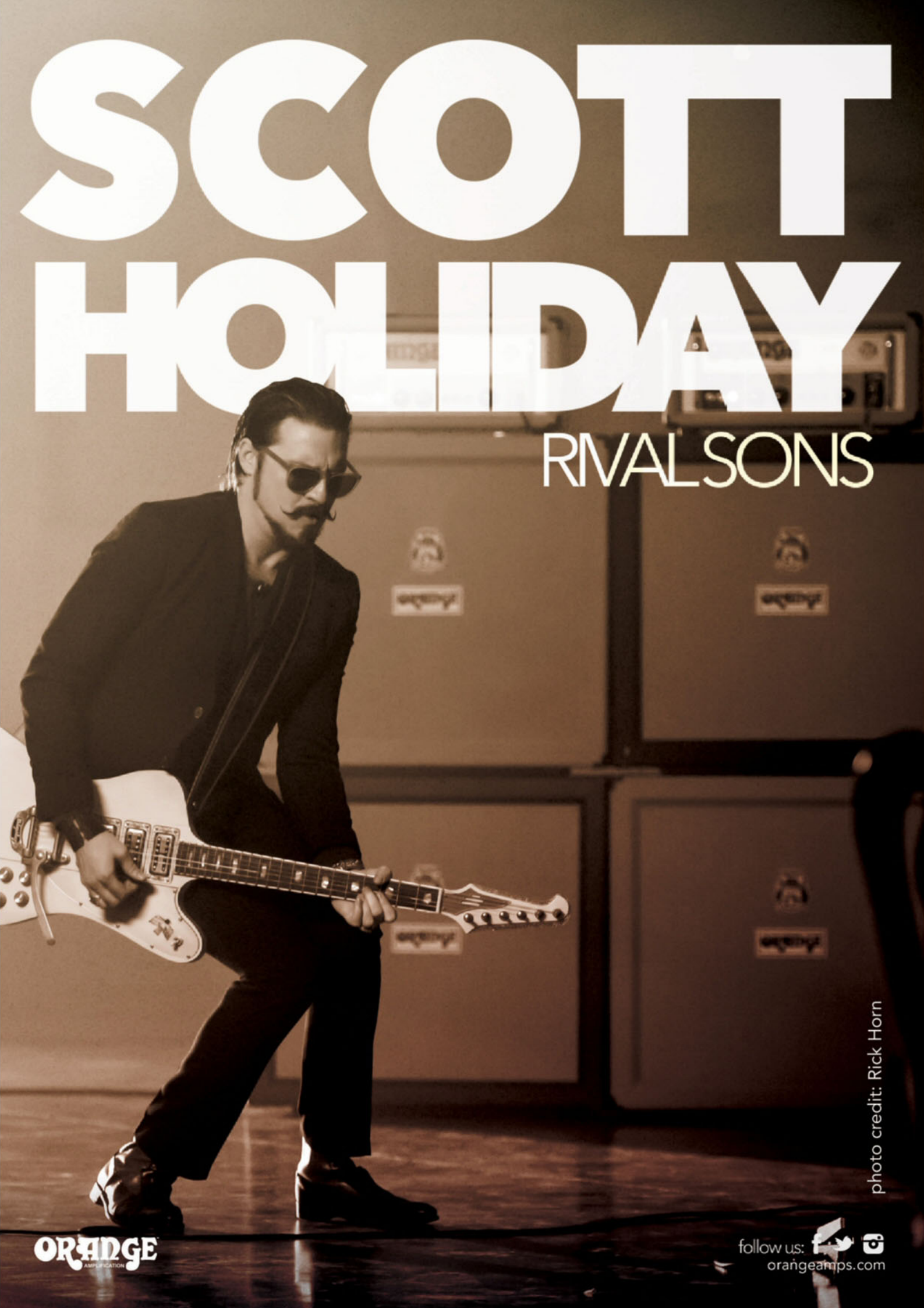
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